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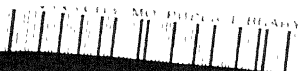
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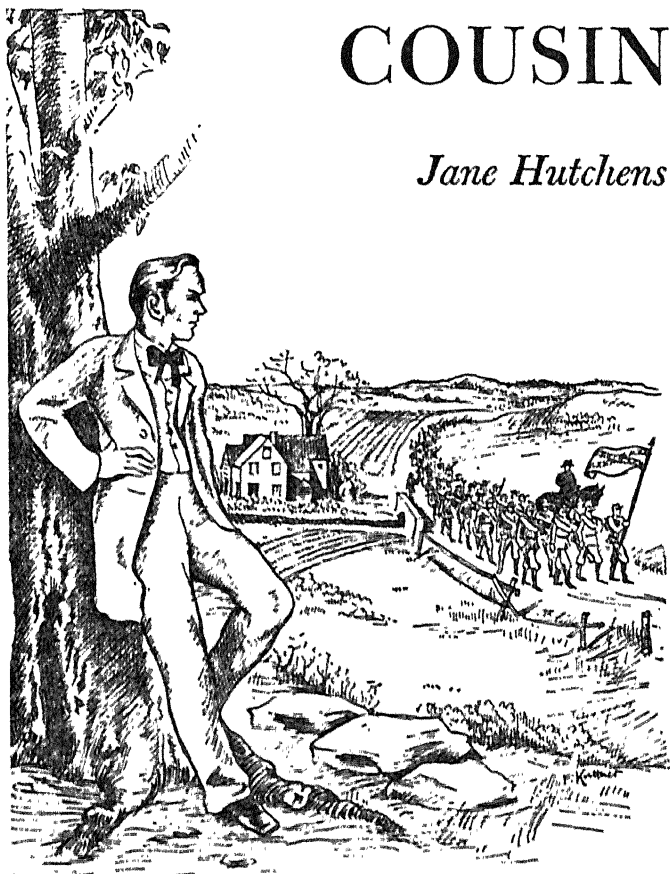
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JOHN BROWN'S COUSIN

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Jane Hutchens



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FIRST EDITION

To
A.C.H. and Permelia Ann

I

THE DAY HENRY SAW A MAN DIE was back in 1854. He was only ten. Until then death had seemed unimportant to him. Killing an animal on the run or a bird on the wing was what guns were made for. He dared waste no shot, for he helped mold the bullets himself. This very morning he had been hunting squirrels. There were two over his shoulder, shot cleanly through the head, to make his sister Relly some soup.

"Relly's been lookin' kinda peaked," his mother had said. "Too much goin's around with that fast-ridin' Ellery Hubbard, just to spite Noah Walker."

It made Henry mad to have Ma talk that way about Ellery Hubbard, whose folks had moved from South Carolina and owned twelve slaves. Ellery knew more about outside things than anyone else. Mushrooms and toadstools even. He could tell them apart, and why some oak trees kept their leaves all winter and why squirrels had bushy tails and rabbits no tails at all.

Ma wanted Relly to marry Noah Walker because his folks had come out from Connecticut along with the Browns to Ohio first and then to Missouri in the last generation. And Henry knew Ma was afraid the Hubbards would think she was old-fashioned. But Henry didn't like Noah much; he was too uppity and quick to get mad, like the time he fought three boys for saying Relly was the teacher's pet.

Henry walked around by the creek to see how the hazelnuts were coming. His slim bare feet made no sound, except when he kicked at some brush to see what would run out. He laid the squirrels over a log that had once been a honey tree, and slid down the bank to the hazel bushes. It was like a secret cave down there where the dark water reflected bending branches. A spring off to the east helped feed the creek in dry weather. Pa said he might someday make it a stock tank when he cleared this section of the woods. Henry skipped a pebble towards a water spider and watched the waves spread and join.

Squirrels were barking in the hickory trees, so Henry hurried back to his gun. Ma had said two squirrels, but if he'd bring three Pa'd brag again—that is, if he'd only shot three times. Henry's hands shook when he poured in the powder, but he made himself get steady before he aimed to fire. He swaggered a bit when he went over to pick up the third squirrel. He wished this soup would give Relly enough backbone to tell Ma she didn't like Noah and that she was going to marry Ellery Hubbard and live in the white house where slaves did all the dirty work, or hard. Relly was pretty, and she'd look like a real lady in one of those houses. Relly ought to be more like Sister Maria,

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though of course he did like to listen .
read to him. It was all Maria could do to read

And just then Henry came out into the clearing with three squirrels over his shoulder. There stood Ellery and Noah, each with his back against a tree. The sun glinted through the oaks to Ellery's light hair and sharpened his features with shadows.

"When that jay flies, shoot," Noah said.

At the hoarse sound of his voice the jay fluttered up from the acorn he was hacking. Henry heard two shots, but the jay was not even hit, and Henry couldn't run fast enough to keep Ellery from falling.

"Quick, Noah," Henry cried as he held Ellery's head on his knees. "I can shoot better'n that!"

But Noah was shaking so hard he almost let his gun fall from his big red hands. "You! You—you saw it, Hank, it was all fair and even. It was either him or me—I—was jist quicker on the draw. It—it's his duelin' pistol. Don't blubber like a baby, and go quick and fetch somebody."

But Henry was trying to bring Ellery to his sights, and to stop the blood that flowed from the hole in his side.

"He's dyin', Noah, and you kilt him." Henry was not ashamed of his weeping. "It ain't right—not that Ellery should die, and they'll hang you—"

Noah threw down his gun and grabbed Hank's shoulders. "No, they won't hang me, Hank Brown, not if you don't tell." Noah was breathing so hard he could barely talk. "And anyhow it was a duel. I tell you, little bawl baby, if you don't stop that blubberin' and go get somebody—"

But Hank was clutching Ellery's shoulder and through

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ed bubble come to Ellery's lips. It caught
ist... and then broke in a jagged drop.

a while Henry realized that his arms ached from
ne weight of Ellery. He couldn't stay here the rest of his
life. He took off his coonskin cap and made a pillow for
Ellery's head on the root of the tree and shaded his face
with wild grape leaves. Noah had gone, and both dueling
pistols, which had come to Missouri from South Carolina,
lay, handles touching.

A jay pecked at an acorn, and Henry's three squirrels
were stiff. Henry felt more alone and afraid than he had
ever felt in the woods. This was the very place that Ellery
had showed him where to find the mushrooms, and how to
tell what was a toadstool and poison—by its smell and its
pale tissue lining. Now Ellery was dead. He might better
have eaten a toadstool. His face was gray as stone, and the
whites of his eyes showed. Henry told himself this wasn't
Ellery, but he knew this was all he would ever see of Ellery
again in his whole life.

Ellery would never ride a horse over a fence again or
come whooping up the lane to get Relly to go to a dance,
and maybe make a willow whistle while he was waiting.
Henry threw himself on the ground and pounded the earth
with his fists and let himself weep until he shook with a
chill that knocked his teeth together.

"I'll never kill any man, Ellery, not ever," he sobbed.
"Like you said with game, I'll shoot to kill quick and no
more than I need if just now you'll come back. Ellery, El-
lery!"

He had said never to take more squirrels or birds or
mushrooms than you needed, so that there would be plenty

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for seed. With sickening shame Henry shot three squirrels. His mother had asked for two, and the third because he wanted to be bragged on at home. He was "big" for a boy his size to be able to handle a gun. Three shots, three squirrels.

Their little forepaws were lifted as in prayer. He felt as guilty as the day he hurt a woodpecker; Ellery had had to kill it to get it out of pain. Henry could hardly bear to touch the squirrels, but he gritted his teeth and started digging and shoving at a rock. He'd not take three home. He'd just take two, and then they couldn't brag, for he had used three balls. Kneeling there as he struggled to replace the stone that he could barely see, he made a vow.

"Before you and God, Ellery, and the extry squirrel, I ain't never goin' to kill nothin' except what I need to eat," and then he thought of the red-headed woodpecker—"or for mercy's sake, and I'll learn my children and my children's children, as they say in the Bible, amen."

Noah had skipped, so Henry didn't have to tell for people to know who shot Ellery Hubbard in a duel to the death. It was lucky for Noah that he was out of reach, for Missourians didn't care if it was a duel and "everythin' planned and fair and either him or me." They had to be pallbearers at Ellery's funeral and watch the Hubbard family lay their next-to-the-oldest son away, and see a beautiful girl get thin with grieving, and some even noticed little Henry who had been the first to find the body.

"It was an awful shock for a child that way, but it would have been much worse if he'd been older and able to understand death," they said.

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all and pale, and with her thin hands and she looked like a princess out of a story.

She asked Henry to take her to the place where Ellery had died, but Henry said he'd got a rock bruise on his heel. Henry couldn't make himself go back with anyone, for he was afraid he'd cry and Relly wouldn't understand, for this grief was supposed to be hers.

Sister Relly in her sorrow was let out of helping her older sister Maria get packed to go settle in Kansas. But Henry was glad for the necessity that kept him from having to walk alone to school through the woods where every squirrel and jay reminded him of Ellery. There weren't close neighbors who went to the log schoolhouse. Most of the boys were helping their pas with the fall plowing, or clearing off ground to seed in the spring.

Henry's four brothers were busy. They were much older, except Thompson. But Thomp at fourteen was big enough to do a man's work. And Henry's baby sister was just old enough to bobble around in everybody's way. She was sleeping now, so Maria could really get ahead.

"How'd you like to go along, Henry?" Maria asked him as he brought straw to pack her tallow candles.

"Too far."

He dropped down on the ground beside the straw and locked his arms about his slim bare legs. (It was warm for October, and he had to save his shoes.) He was brown from the top of his shaggly hair to the soles of his slim bare feet, with his hickory-dyed clothes and his sunburned skin—that is, all but his eyes, which were as blue as Ma's.

"Oh, Kansas ain't too far," Maria argued. "Just across

the river and south a piece. Land's cheap. Why don't you come along and get yourself an Indian for a wife, maybe?"

Henry laughed to cover his blushing. He made pretend he was old enough to decide now. "Wife? I'd liefer marry to a darky than an Indian."

"Hoity-toity, Mister Henry." Maria reached over and tousled his hair. "I'll miss you, honey boy."

"Don't 'honey boy' me!" He tumbled over out of her reach, perhaps to keep her from seeing how near he was to crying at the thought of her leaving for good.

"Run fetch them plantings, then, old Chief Hard-as-a-rock."

Henry jumped and shied towards the house. Maria had been next to his mother. For her to marry was bad enough (she was past twenty-three, and everybody thought sure she'd be an old maid), but to go way off to a strange place with a man like Ed Griffie that Pa called poor white trash was terrible. Maria's husband's people, Pa said, had been in Missouri thirty years and still didn't own a passel of land big enough to feed a bull.

This government land in Kansas was cheap, and if Ed had it in him to accumulate something for Maria, Pa was willing to back him. All that was really in Ed's favor was that he didn't believe in slaves. Maybe because most slaves had it better than Ed's people. The Hubbards' slaves lived in a house good enough for white folks.

Henry brought the bag of plantings. It was too heavy for him to carry, but he struggled with it until he got to the yard gate and Maria came running to help.

"Here, don't drag them. You'll beat off the buds. I'll help."

There were sprouts and young trees of walnut and hickory, poplar and willow, elm, apple and pear, for everybody knew there wasn't anything but prairie grass in Kansas. Maria pulled so hard that the knot of chestnut hair at the nape of her neck loosened and coiled down her back. "Five years from now, Hank, you come out and we'll have our own fruit and nuts like you have here in Missouri. And we'll let you make up your mind about marryin', you'll be fifteen."

She sat down on the candle box and started twisting up her hair. Her hands, neat and brown, threaded in and out slowly as she looked at the plantings with dreams in her eyes. "Kinda too bad to pull 'em up by the roots that away, ain't it? Some of 'em's bound to die."

Henry didn't like the word.

"But me and Ed is pullin' up our roots too, I guess. I hope we can stand transplantin'."

Henry felt he ought to say something, but his throat closed.

"It'll be hardest leavin' all you children." Maria as the oldest always thought of her brothers and sisters as young children. "But you can write to me, Henry, and I'll get word about all that happens."

Henry brightened. He had never had a letter in his life. That was one of the teacher's arguments for learning to write, that he might want to write letters when he grew up. Now he wouldn't have to wait to grow.

"And we'll send word by everybody that comes east, won't that be fine?" Dreaming, Maria continued to sit on the candle box. "And, Henry, just think, I'm goin' to be a part of another beginnin' state like Pa and Ma was. I'm

takin' Ma's old loom too, and Ed's gettin' Pa's rifle. Henry, think of it, we're goin' to farm land that a white man ain't set foot on before."

"You'd better get packin'." Henry couldn't face Maria's visions. They weren't like the rest of the family's. They made her forget she was washing dishes, so that she poured soapsuds into the coffeepot or put the wood in the cupboard and a dish on the fire. Maybe that was the reason she hadn't married sooner.

"There'll be a state capital, and Ed might get to be gov'ner someday," Maria continued to dream, though she did heed Henry's warning. "Ed says we'll come home every year or so when the crops is in."

Ma said Ed talked too much, but she must like Ed or she wouldn't have let Maria marry with him.

Just then Ed and Thomp came up from the woods with two sacks of walnuts. "They ain't dry yet, Mariar, but I guess they'll have plenty time for that while I'm buildin' you a house in the new territory."

Maria stopped her work to smile at him. He was head and shoulders taller than she, and his dead-black hair and beard made him look much older. Some said he was too good-looking for his own good *and* Maria's. Right now, he openly put his arm around her and lifted her up to kiss her mouth. Henry didn't like that. It made her red up with shame at Ed's forwardness.

"You're a damn pretty female, Mrs Griffie. Ain't I right, Thomp?"

Thomp, the one absolutely red-headed Brown, kicked at a bag of walnuts and said he didn't know.

"Don't, Ed." Maria struggled out of his arms. "You'd

better help finish this packin' if we aim to git started early in the mornin'."

"Sec, boys! Already she thinks she can boss me around. Even calls me by my first name." Ed laughed so wide that Henry could see his strong back teeth.

Ed sat down on the ground beside the walnuts.

"Less see what she can do with me if I don't want to move." He winked at Thomp.

"I'll help her." Henry ran over to struggle with the roll of bedding that was wrapped in a runner of new rag carpet.

"That's fine, whippersnapper. Like a flea offerin' to help the dog." Ed thrust out his big boot and upset Henry so that he tumbled under the wagon.

Henry felt his forehead sting, and then somehow he was stinging all over with fury towards this big ox of a man. He felt himself grabbed up into Maria's arms before he could get to his feet.

"Ed—you—why don't you pick on a body your own size?" She started to wipe the trickle of blood that showed on Henry's forehead.

Henry knew he hated Ed Griffie. He'd rather see him dead than going off with Maria to Kansas. He fought his way out of his sister's arms and darted for her husband. Before Ed could know what was happening, Henry's little fists had smashed twice into the luxurious black whiskers.

"White trash!" Henry almost bellowed at him. "White trash, that's what you are, white trash!"

Ed got his balance and caught Henry's flailing arms. "Trash, eh? You little devil. Mariar, take this wildcat and put him in a cage. It ain't safe for me to hold him. I might hold him too tight. And I guess me and you had better get

movin' today. No use waitin' till mornin'. White trash, huh? He didn't think it up hisself, the little bastard."

Henry lay limp in Maria's arms to put her off guard and watched his chance to dash to the woods.

And so he didn't even get to see his favorite sister leave for Kansas.

It was dark when he finally came back to the house, and even though there was a wagon out in front, he knew it was not Maria's, but that it belonged to the peddler Jolas who came twice a year. Henry slunk up to the house. By standing on the copper milk kettle he could lift himself up on the sills by his arms, and thus see into the kitchen. It made him feel more than ever forlorn and cold and sick with tears and hunger. He had eaten nothing since morning but some red haws. The blood from the gash on his forehead had caked on his skin and made him feel miserable wounded. Maybe he would die like Ellery.

Henry had found plenty of time to think about Ellery and the squirrel today. If it hadn't been for Maria and her grabbing him off of Ed, he might have killed him. He was that mad. And Henry knew in his heart he didn't want to kill Ed. He just wanted to hurt him someway so he'd never hurt Maria again. Make him remember. All it had done was to make Ed call him a bastard and go off mad as a bull.

Often, during the afternoon, Henry had heard Thomp and Relly call to him. But never Maria or Ma. Always he had stayed hidden. Once in an oak tree, once in the hollow and once behind a dead log with leaves pulled over him.

"You little shikepoke, come on out of that bush," Thomp

yelled. "I know where you are, and if you don't come, I'll start beatin'."

But Henry could see from above that Thomp was looking all around when he shouted. Henry wanted to holler back, "You couldn't hide no more than a red-headed wood-pecker."

And now Thomp sat next to Mother at the table in Henry's own place. Jolas, the peddler, was in Thomp's place next to Pa. The candles at the head and foot of the table were burning low while all of them listened to Jolas instead of Ed, for Ed and Maria had gone. Jolas was getting to help eat the wild turkey Ma had baked for Maria's last supper with the family.

Most of the dishes were empty, with only the turkey bones left on the plates. Relly looked much peartened up and chewed commonly on a bone as she listened. The three elder brothers leaned forward with their arms on the table; they looked so much alike that strangers couldn't tell them apart. This was strange to Henry; anybody with half a mind could tell that George had bluer eyes than Jim and Will laughed twice as much as both the others together. Their beards were the same color, but you could easily tell Jim was the youngest because his brown beard was mighty young and tender-looking. Henry remembered when he used to sit on George's knee and eat out of his plate, and how it hurt when Joycie got his place, though he had a plate of his own.

Just looking at little yellow-haired Joycie on George's knee made the tears salt down Henry's cheeks. She was chubby and bold, but when she let her head lean back on

her brother's shoulder and her eyelashes pulled her eyes shut, she looked like a picture of the baby Jesus.

Henry had to look away.

There was Pa stroking his brown beard where the gray streaks came down on each side. He was listening to Jolas. All the dishes had been moved out of the peddler's way, because one time he had broken a cup as he talked.

And Henry was missing all of this. Jolas told the best stories of anybody in the world. Henry could hold up no longer; his foot slipped, and the copper kettle turned over with a clatter. He lay sobbing just where he fell. The rest of his life he would be shut out; he probably was a bastard, though he didn't know what that was. He only knew it was the worst name you could call a body.

He heard the back door open. He rolled close to the wall and shut his eyes. Even then he could tell a flame was licking in the wind somewhere, even close enough to smell the tallow.

"Git up, Henry, hit's Ma."

For a moment he couldn't bear to open his eyes. Ma might be mad at him or hurt and not loving him like she did the rest. She was the smallest one in the family if you didn't count Henry and Joycie, but she was suddenly the most important.

"Open your eyes, Henry. I saved you a leg of turkey and some dressin' and gravy, settin' in the kittle on the hearth. You must be near starved."

Henry came up to his knees and wrapped his arms tight around Ma's legs to bury his face in her skirts. They smelled of wood smoke and tobacco. Henry thought he had never smelled anything more to his liking.

"Ma, I ain't no bastard, am I?"

"Bastard! Who said you was!" Ma threw back her head like a hound treeing a coon.

"Ed."

"Git up from there, I Henry,"—Ma had him by the arm—"and we'll go tell that to your pa and see if he's still amind to whup you proper for flailin' into Ed like a wild Injun and callin' him what he'd called Ed before you."

Maria didn't write as she had promised I Henry, and she didn't even come back for Sister Relly's wedding in April. Relly was marrying Nate, Ellery's older brother. Everybody thought it a wonderful match because Nate had been married before and was already set up to housekeeping. His first wife had even left him some money. He and Relly would have a wonderful start, with six slaves to do their work for them. Nate and the Hubbards were different from the Browns in that they owned slaves and raised tobacco and fine horses instead of corn and hogs.

Relly wasn't used to sitting around idle, but I Henry knew she'd like it. Relly was a lady all right. She could read better than anybody in the school, though she wasn't so good at figures, and she knew how to show off proper so she'd be a credit to Nate when he took her to South Carolina to see his uncles and aunts when the crops were in.

"But I don't like hit," Pa told Ma. "I lit ain't right that one of my own children should hold a human in bondage—black or white."

"Now, Mister Brown," Ma soothed him, "you wouldn't want that she should marry with that duelin' Noah Walker."

"She might a-done worse. Though I can't say as I fancy a son-in-law that has to hide out."

"For all we see of Mariar and Ed, they might as well be hidin' out."

Henry always stuck his head under the covers when they started talking about Ed and Maria at night, because he felt so tarnal guilty. (He still slept in the trundle bed with Baby Joycie, a thing that he pretended made him mad.)

He was sorry Maria couldn't get to see all the fixings for this wedding. He was jealous that Relly's dress was costing ten times more than Maria's. But to marry with a Hubbard a girl had to look her best, and Henry thought maybe all the food and clothes wouldn't be a waste. All those seven hams and the two pigs that were ready to cook tomorrow would let the Hubbards know that they were proud to have Relly marry with them, but that they didn't aim to be beholden to any Hubbard.

Henry had tried to like Nate, but Nate was even older than Maria and not in the least like Ellery. And besides Nate was too busy with things about the county to have time for a boy. Nate was away two weeks in March, and Nate's little brother said Nate was working to make Kansas a slave state like South Carolina. One of the older brothers slapped his face for telling tales out of school, and made Henry promise never to say a word about it to his pap. It wasn't long after that till Nate promised to let Henry ride his best mare, Flash, sometime. Flash was the most unforgettable mare in the neighborhood; she had a bald face and a honey-colored mane and tail, and the rest of her was the richest sorrel you'd ever hope to see.

On the day of the wedding, as the family waited for the

first guests, Pa said to Henry, "Will you see that you behave yourself today? And hold your tongue."

Pa, tall and rangy in his store clothes and polished home-made boots, faced Henry, too small for Thomp's handed-down suit he was wearing, and mortally uncomfortable in his store shoes bought specially for the wedding.

"I've got one son-in-law that won't speak to me even though I did give him my rifle and set him up to farmin'. That rifle cost two hundred dollars when it was made."

Henry grinned and scuffed the toe of his new shoes against the rag carpet. In six months that had passed since Ed and Maria left, Henry's father had learned to laugh at the whole business, though for the first few weeks he didn't give Henry one word that wasn't absolutely necessary.

"I s'pose you'll tell Nate I don't believe in slaves?"

"No, sir."

"And that I'd like to rawhide any Missourian that would send a bunch of roughnecks into Kansas to vote slave at 'lection?"

"No, sir." Henry squirmed. He wished a body wore day clothes to a wedding instead of Sunday ones, because a wedding lasted such a time to make a body miserable.

"And remember, no fightin' with the little Hubbard boys that come to the weddin'. And too, keep away from that bowl of float!"

"Yes, sir."

He wished he dared take off his shoes and run to hide in the woods, or hunt rabbits or birds' nests. He wished it was Ellery his sister was marrying, but Ellery was dead six months and Noah Walker was drinking heavily, and some-

body said he couldn't have bought that fine horse he was riding. Noah was telling folks he'd eaten a meal off of Ed Griffie in Kansas, and intended to eat one off of old man Brown before he left.

Henry didn't even tell Pa that Noah was threatening to come to the wedding. But he really didn't need to, for when it was past midnight and some people were getting their horses to go home, they found that Nate's bald-faced mare, Flash, was gone from the rack, and two of the biggest hams from the spit. There was some writing at the hitch rack where the halter had been.

If Nate had found it first, maybe he wouldn't have read it out loud, but Lige Barrow found it, and he was so proud he could read that he brought it right in where all the women and men were dancing and read it. When the music stopped, Henry woke up from his place behind the fiddlers.

Lige read slowly and carefully so as not to make a mistake, " 'This hoss was saw at the 'lection in Kansas. I guess hit is a Kansas hoss. Hit ort to be. I'll be takin' hit whar hit voted.' "

Nate came forward and took the note from Lige. Nate wore gentlemen's boots and store-bought clothes, but now he looked as red and hot as the others. "Where did this come from?"

Lige explained again. "Hit looks like Noah Walker's doin's if you ask me."

None of the Walker family was present at the wedding. Even though Ma spoke to Mrs Walker in church and always passed the time of day, it didn't look just right to have the Walkers to Ellery's brother's wedding.

"If this is a joke, I'll thrash the one who is at the bottom of it," Nate threatened.

"Hell, hit ain't no joke. Hit looks to me more than a thrashin's due. Maybe a hempin'," one of the Morelock twins said.

Henry felt the hair creep on the back of his neck. Hempin'! Noah Walker was mortally afraid of that! Henry's throat ached. He didn't like Noah, but how could those fellows think for sure he had been the one to steal Flash?

Nate turned to face Relly. His boots glinted in the candlelight. All at once Henry realized that he looked too many years old.

"Aurelia, would you recognize Noah's writing if you saw it?"

Relly had turned as white as salt. "I—I don't know."

"I'm sorry to have to do this, my dear, but you will have to excuse me and my friends. We've got work to do." He pivoted on his heel to face the group. "Does anybody here know Noah's writing?"

Henry could feel Noah's hands trembling on his shoulders.

"Hit's Noah's all right," the other Morelock twin said, anxious to get at the exciting business of hanging someone.

"You're lyin', Tad Morelock."

Everybody turned to face the one who had dared cross a Morelock, and saw the small child in his brother's too-large suit and his own store shoes, now unfastened for comfort.

Even Thomp was too startled to put his hand over Henry's mouth or to tell him to hush up.

"You can't even read yourself, Tad Morelock." Henry's voice rose high and childlike in this room full of grown people. "I guess Noah Walker would know enough not to say 'hit' in a letter, 'hit's' I-T in writin'."

Several people giggled out loud.

"Maybe he's disguisin' hisself."

"Whatever he's doing, all this talk don't bring back my mare." Nate was suddenly losing his fine polish of manners, and he shouted like the rest. "Who's ready to come help?"

Relly burst out crying as the door closed. Her red-gold curls tumbled over her hands as she covered her face. This was a pretty finish to her wedding, all the young men riding off into the night with half the food still untouched.

Henry was wide awake now, and cold in the crowded hot room. Thomp shoved his head as he passed.

"Why do you allus have to be such a little fool, Hank?"

Already you could hear the men mounting their horses, shouting directions as they laid off the territory for proper search. There were short cuts for every road, but Noah Walker knew them, too. If it was Noah, it looked as if they could never catch him.

It was coming up daylight when they found the mare, shot through the head. She had broken her leg when she fell jumping a ditch. It was nearly nine before they found a rider. The man they found was not Noah Walker. He claimed to be a traveler on his way to Kansas to settle a piece of land. He said he'd never seen a bald-faced mare with a white tail in all his life. He was walking to the river to catch a ride on a river boat. He had ridden part way

with a peddler named Jolas the day before. He did have a gun, but after all about everybody had a gun these days.

"Where's Jolas now?" someone asked.

"I left him about twenty miles back yisterday." The little man quavered when he tried to talk.

"Does anybody know when Jolas was through here last spring?" Nate's cousin was taking charge, Nate was so broken up over Flash.

One of the older Brown boys answered: "Jolas was through to our place last year Good Friday. I remember, because me and Pa was plantin' the pertaters."

The crowd debated. Easter was in April last year—late; that meant that Jolas would be by in about a week.

"But if we let this hoss thief get by till then, no tellin' who of his gang'll come to let him loose."

"We wouldn't want to hang the wrong man, though."

"Wrong man! Hell, look at them bowed legs! He was no walker, he's a hoss thief," Tad Morelock argued.

Lige Barrow finally was the one to think of a plan. "Let's have him write what was on the note and we can tell if he is the one. That little Brown young 'un is smarter'n we give him credit for."

So Nate took the only piece of paper on him, his wedding certificate, and gave it to the shaking little man.

"Write, 'It's a Kansas horse.'"

Lige Barrow repeated, "Write, 'I lit's a Kansas hoss.'"

The little man put "hit" in writing, so the men strung him up and went home to their breakfasts.

Henry's oldest brother George told them all at the table that it was Henry's idea that made them know how to prove

that the fellow was guilty. "Tad Morelock said that anybody'd know he was a hoss thief to look at his legs, bowed like barrel hoops."

Henry turned white and went out behind the wood lot and was sick.

Ma tried to talk to him. "Little boys ort to be seen and not heard." She changed it to suit her need. "Next time you hold your tongue. Too much talkin' never done nobody no good. Hit ain't your fault."

"Ma, Ma, you said 'hit'!" Henry burst out crying again. "But Noah Walker wouldn't say 'hit' on paper—he was smart at school, next to Relly in smartness."

"Never mind now, Jolas will be here in a day or two and he'll tell us this man never seen him in his lyin' little life."

But Jolas didn't.

In fact Jolas, at the same place he had eaten the night Ed and Maria left, told the family and friends that he'd given a ride to a short bandy-legged fellow who was aiming to take up a piece of land in Kansas, near Lawrence, same as Mr Brown's daughter and son-in-law.

Henry, cold and hot with anticipation for the moment when Jolas would come to this part of his story, fainted dead away. Now he knew for certain he had saved Noah's neck with another's.

Ma told the neighbors and friends who came to inquire about the sick child that Henry had a bad case of chills and fever he'd caught when he went into the woods one night and got lost. But Henry wasn't lost. He was promising Ellery all over again that he'd never, never kill another man.

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Ma left her weaving to sit beside Henry when he had the chills; she'd pile hot rocks about him in bed, and though it was hot for May, he'd shake until his teeth rattled. And then when his fever soared he would cry in his sleep, "Cut him down. He didn't do it. It's not 'hit' in writin'. You've got no call to hang a man because his legs is bowed." And I Henry would scream until Ma woke him up. When the sweats came, Ma would light her pipe so that Henry could watch the smoke.

"You've just got the ager, Henry. When you've got enough tonic inside you, hit'll stop."

But calomel and quinine did not stop Henry's illness that came regularly every other day, so one Sunday Pa drove to Hainsville for a doctor.

Ma gave Henry a bath with lye soap and fixed up the big bed in fresh old sheets because they were bleached whiter than the new ones, and made up the trundle bed and pushed it away.

"Am I goin' to die, Ma?" Henry's voice was pale, too. He couldn't remember ever really sleeping in the big bed before. This was Pa's bed, and it was never moved from this special corner because Pa wanted to be where he could see into the kitchen fireplace when he went to sleep. Ma said it was because he'd always slept by the open fire when he was a boy and when they lived in the old house.

"Course you're not goin' to die, I Henry."

But Henry saw a tear like a bead that held itself in a wrinkle under Ma's eye. He didn't know that he cared much if he did die, but it would be awful to be put in the ground with soggy clay piled on till it pressed in the lid. Folks didn't have doctors till they were about to die or

have a birthin', he knew that much. And Relly had been mighty good to him, and even red-headed Thomp hadn't pushed him on the back of the head and told him to hush up for a long time, and he'd gone to the pasture to gather strawberries, and once had brought him a May apple. Henry smelled it all day, though he couldn't eat it because the taste was too sweet.

If he died, Henry wondered, would they send for Maria to come? He wished they'd send for her anyway so she'd sing to him and talk in her dreamy voice about the new Kansas state capital, or even Ed—until he could forget everything that had happened since the day he saw Ellery with the red bubble on his lips.

When the doctor came, everyone stood around just as if he were the preacher, and wouldn't sit down until he did, and tried to hand him things before he knew himself what he wanted.

"They tell me you went into the woods and got swamp fever," the doctor said as he took out his great silver watch and laid it on the bed beside Henry. Henry felt that his heart would burst out his ribs when the doctor bent to rest his hairy ear against Henry's chest.

"Good heart you've got there," he told Henry comfortingly. "No call to worry with a stout heart like that. Got anybody to play with when you aren't having a chill?"

"Baby Joycie."

"What about this great big red-headed fellow here?" He pointed to Thomp, now fifteen, tall as Pap and getting a thick fuzz on his lip.

"I work." Thomp's voice was part deep and part thin, but it came out all deep this time.

"No boys around here to play with?"

Henry shook his head. This was a strange way for a doctor to talk to a body about to die.

"How'd you like to have a boy about your size to wait on you till you're fit to do for yourself?"

Henry smiled wanly and said with the complacence of the ill, "Ma does it."

"Yes, but she's got other irons in the fire. Down at Hainsville there's an orphan about your size—his folks died of smallpox up in Nodaway County while he was visiting his grandma. When she died the next year some neighbors brought him this far and dropped him off at Hainsville. The boy's got a fiddle, and he can play some tunes."

Henry couldn't believe his ears. A boy playing a fiddle!

"Widder Patch said she'd board and sleep him," Pa was speaking. "Come winter, he'd earn his keep carryin' wood and water, but she don't have enough to keep him busy in summer, so the town's lookin' for a place to send him."

It was a long speech for Pa, and he pulled his beard when he had finished like a boy twisting a button on his coat while he talked to the teacher. But Pa was looking at Ma.

"What do you think, Mister Brown?" Ma asked.

"I could bring him back with me."

"Good." The doctor gave Henry a thump on his chest that made him gasp. "This boy's just got the plain ague, and there's no sign of yellow fever or cholera. There's been plenty of cholera up and down the river. Enough of quinine and somebody to play with so he'll not be lonesome in the woods and have too much time to think and he'll come out of it. And listen, boy, eat plenty to cover them ribs—be bustin' right through your hide if you don't watch out."

So Henry wasn't going to die. That night, when Pa came back with the orphan, Henry couldn't even close his eyes in sleep for fear of missing something of the new stranger.

Hezekiah Eagan was his name, and he told them straight off, with a scowl as black as his curly hair that fell over his forehead and collar, that "ary one that calls me that will get his shins barked—and from me. Hez is enough."

The next moment Hez lifted the fiddle to his chin, and with a smile for Ma and a wink for Joycie that set the latter to bouncing up and down in a giggle, he drew out the tune "Blue Bells of Scotland" as if he were giving them a present.

"Do you like that 'un?" he asked Joycie, who bobbed her head and climbed down off of Pap's lap and came to sit on her little stool at Hez's feet.

That night Ma said to Pa, when she thought Henry was asleep, "Maybe we'd ortn't to send him back to Widder Patch at all, come winter."

Henry's pulse beat fast in his throat. Ma had already given his place to the fiddler—and so had Joycie. It was easy to see how far she had gone!

But Pa turned in the bed until the rope cording groaned, and said into his beard: "Not so fast, Mother. This boy's as fresh as new-cooked soap, but ary one of my boys talk so unmannered and I'd wear him out with a hickory pole. We'll keep him till frost and see could he learn his place."

Henry pondered these words as the days came and went from cool to hot. He was glad he had heard Pa's answer, for otherwise he might have tried some of Hez's tricks. You'd have thought the fact that Hez was an orphan would have made him beholden to somebody that fed and sheltered him—but not Hez. He'd as likely chop down a bee

tree by himself as do the milking, and the way he had Joycie following him around was a shame to see. He made her a little book out of a mussel shell. Nobody else would ever have thought of that. Carved the little book so it looked closed and tight, but the pages uneven like Ma's Bible. Oh, he could do fine things with his hands, but he wouldn't milk.

After Henry was up and almost well again, he had to help Thomp milk five cows. But Hez only laughed and ran off to hide when Thomp tried to get him to learn to milk.

"Pap, that young 'un is lazy as dirt," Thomp stormed one night as he unhooked Pap's team from haying.

Henry was stripping his last cow, his head pressed against a too hot flank.

"If you'd give me leave, I'd make that Hez Eagan learn to milk, or I'd break every bone in his body."

Pap only smiled slightly, not enough to part his beard, and pointed to Henry. "We've got Hez to thank for your brother there bein' on the mend. I guess he's earned his board and keep."

Henry went to the house bent sidewise with his bucket of foamy milk, as happy as he'd been when he used to shoot just for fun. Pa must think he was worth a lot, because Hez ate like a grown man, and Pa had told Ma she should make him a suit of homespun to take back to Widder Patch's for winter.

"I heard what your pap said!" Hez jumped out from behind the springhouse door as Henry came in with the milk.

It was almost dark in the springhouse. The stone crocks

with their pine covers seemed the only light as they huddled in the trough.

"Say, don't do that! You near made me spill this milk."

"Suppose I did?"

"I'd—I'd—"

"Don't say you'd lick me, 'cause you're scared to."

Hez stood spread-legged in front of Henry and emphasized his last words by jerks of his head that made his black curls bob.

"Try me and see." Henry felt suddenly strong enough to throw the bucket of milk over the tallest sycamore tree in the woods lot. Just then Hez put out his foot and tripped Henry.

"You thunderin' lazy-as-dirt orphan, you!" And Henry was up flailing into Hez. Nobody was watching to see that all was fair until the noise brought Ma running from the kitchen.

Both boys were drenched with warm milk, their noses were bloody, and Henry had eight toothmarks on his arm. It was that bit of dirty fighting that made him mad enough to get on top and pound Hez's head against the hard dirt floor of the springhouse until Hez started to yell.

"And you help me with the milkin' after this!" Henry heard himself shouting before Ma finally got him by the collar and choked off his wind.

"You boys!" Ma had them both facing each other now, panting like a pair of winded horses. Henry wasn't scared for the first time when Ma caught him in a ruckus. He suddenly realized that Hez was half a head taller and that Hez had been the one to yell.

"You boys!" Ma shook them both, a bit as an ant shakes a caterpillar, for Ma wasn't half a head taller than Hez. "When my boys fight I allus make them kiss and make up."

Henry felt the pressure of authority. He'd as leave cuss God as disobey Ma. He looked down so that he wouldn't have to see the blood on Hez's face.

"All right now, do as I say." Ma's voice was high-pitched and determined when she got riled up.

Henry leaned forward, his lips pursed, his eyes shut tight, which after all was a good thing, for Hez, unaccustomed to obeying Ma though she wasn't bigger than a girl, drew back and spat into Henry's face just before he swiveled away from under Ma's little hand. He dashed out into the settling gloom.

Before Ma and Henry could recover from their shock and horror, Hez had snatched up his fiddle and gone down the road.

"So you made him say uncle, did you, Henry?" Pa asked at the table that night as he dipped his corn bread in the pot liquor from the green stringbeans. "I don't reckon as that's a way to treat an orphan, but he showed his stripe when he spit on you and didn't mind your ma."

He turned to one of the older brothers. There were only two now, because Will had pulled up and gone to California to look for gold. The family missed his laugh at the table. "You better go saddle a horse and go pick up that little Hez and his fiddle. You'll probably find him along the road somers. You can take him in to old Doc and tell him we won't be needin' the orphan now."

Everybody kept right on eating.

"I'm mighty glad Widder Patch has got a little more brawn than your ma."

Then everybody laughed, even Ma, for she knew Pa liked her to be small.

It was still summer when Ed's mother sent word that Maria had a baby girl named Hannah.

Henry said the name over to himself. Maria always had promised that if she had a little boy of her own she would call him Henry, but after what had happened she couldn't do that. But "Hannah"—"Henry"—they sounded a lot alike. That must be Maria's way of telling him she wasn't mad.

From then on things were almost as they had been before.

By the time Jolas came through the country again, Henry almost fitted the suit he had worn at Relly's wedding. He sat with the rest of the family and listened to Jolas' stories while he fingered the shawl around Ma's shoulders that Pa had bought her for a present.

"The man's name was Brown same as yours, John Brown," Jolas said, his voice lowered so that all of them had to bend forward to hear. "And he put me in the mind of you. If he'd had a full beard he could of passed for your brother."

"Well, I'll say." Pa clawed at his beard.

"Him and one son and a son-in-law was goin' west to Kansas. They stopped in Waverly to get the body of the old man's grandchild that died last spring from cholery. The child had died on the *New Lucy* and there wasn't anything to do but put the parents ashore with the dead. The old man said none of his blood was going to be buried

in slave territory. If you ask me, he's got somethin' heavier than beddin' in that cart. No beddin' makes a horse and a man and two boys have to pull like old Harry to get up a hill."

Jolas leaned back and let his sharp black eyes circle the group. He picked out Thomp. "One boy wasn't but a year or so older than him, I'd say, name of Oliver. I talked with them just like I'm talkin' to you, and told him I knew a Brown. Right off he asked if you was a slavocrat, livin' in this slave state."

Pa riled up right away. "I guess you told him?"

"I did. And he told me to tell you that you'd better do what he's doin', move to Kansas with all your votin' sons to keep the place from goin' slave."

"Say his name was John Brown?"

"Yes, John Brown. His sons have settled in Brownsville close to Osawatimie. Last election, they say,"--and again Jolas looked all around the table and lowered his voice to a hiss--"Missouri slavocrats came over in hordes and kept the real settlers away from the ballot boxes."

And by now Henry knew for certain that Relly's husband, Nate, always took a crowd over and paid for their liquor on the way.

"Come another 'lection, some of us honest God-fearin' ones ort to go over and help guard them boxes. Everyone ort to know that slavin' is wrong."

Henry looked quickly at Ma. She didn't like for Pa to get started on slave talk, especially as long as Relly and Nate owned six of them.

"That's why I think old man Brown's wagon ain't filled with beddin'. I think hit's *guns*."

A hush settled around the table like smoke from Ma's pipe on a still summer night.

"We ain't heard the last of them Browns, I'll bet."

"He didn't name the name of his pa, did he?"

"No, but he come from Connecticut."

"My pa come from there, too. That must make us cousins. My pa fought in the Revolution and got gover'ment land in Ohio. That's where I was born. He wasn't much of a man to talk, but he had brothers older and younger than him that still lived in Connecticut."

"Pap, you'd better not be too quick to claim kin to him. He might get hisself into trouble," Jim warned.

Blood did run thick as far as Pa was concerned, for in the spring of '56, when all the talk in western Missouri was Kansas trouble, and Ma had heard through Ed Griffie's folks that Ed and Maria had lost all their stock but their team to some border ruffians, Pa was proud to know that old John Brown was there to avenge Ed. He was glad to claim kin to Captain Brown, as he was known at the time.

It seemed that Henry's memory of the next three years hinged on John Brown and the awful fact that Pa claimed kin to him. It wasn't so bad when everybody was talking about old man Brown and his boys with a regiment that saved Lawrence from being burned by the ruffians. Though Henry knew Nate had gone over into Kansas to take a bunch of men, he couldn't help feeling good that a man by the name of Brown was the one that made them sign a treaty. Though the treaty didn't last any time at all, for the first thing Henry knew, Lawrence was burned, Atchison with his army of Missourian and other Southern reinforcements

simply took the place. It wasn't more than three days later (the latter part of May '56) that the awful Pottawatomie murders took place.

Even then Pa wouldn't deny that he was a cousin of old John Brown. Even with the fact that the old man had murdered five men in cold blood, Pa continued to argue.

"Somebody else did the murders and put the blame on John and his boys to try to scare them out of the country."

Henry was afraid his own family was going to break up over John Brown on the Sunday Pa started arguing with Relly.

"Now, Relly," Pap said, as if he were saying the last word of authority, "you know there's fifty votin' Missourians in Kansas to every honest Brown. And if you must say that he even took the saddles and horses of the men he was supposed to have killed, all right, but didn't people drive off Mariar's stock and take everythin' loose? Sure, but what Missourians are all het up about it? Honest Missourians can't go over into Kansas to farm like decent folks, for fear the lyin' Missourians will go over there and vote the place slave."

Henry saw the tears spring to Relly's eyes. He was ashamed of Pap, even though the killings were claimed to be a scare for slavocrats on the Kansas border. Henry still thought it was like hanging the wrong man. Who had burned the town of Lawrence? It was an awful mix-up. Henry could almost prove that Nate took another bunch over in the spring—and there wasn't the least doubt that Nate's cousin from South Carolina had come up with the army that some of the Southern states had sent to Kansas under Major Buford.

Why all the fuss over slaves anyhow? Henry was twelve when he made up his mind that Relly and Nate's slaves were right well off. What would they do if they did get spirited off to Canada by some of the abolitionists? Niggers didn't like cold weather (Henry didn't blame them; he didn't, either) and it was tarnal cold up there. Relly's slaves were two men and a woman and a boy. Nate had been hard up and had to sell off the two biggest field hands. The man was gloomy sometimes when he thought of his wife in South Carolina, but Nate had promised that when he sold the other two he'd buy that wife the first chance he got.

Thomp, now almost seventeen, and as hotheaded as his hair might make him look, thought a bunch of them ought to ride into Kansas and hunt down old man Brown and his boys and crack their necks from a limb. He even said so at one of the Sunday dinners when all the family was there but Maria. Nate would never have said such a thing out loud, but Henry guessed Nate had said it first to Thomp. (Just like Pa had said that about Ed.) Thomp was going back and forth a lot to Relly's to court one of the Brooking girls. Mr Brooking had ten slaves.

Pa got red in the face and pushed back his chair from the table. "Crack his neck, would you, Thomp?" Pa said so loud that even bold little Joycie, gnawing on a pully bone, stopped to stare. "And who'd help you? That old man has more guts than all you little snivelin' boasters put together. What happened when Captain Pate went shooting off into Kansas to capture John Brown? Got himself captured, remember? And didn't the militia turn Brown loose? Didn't a judge in court refuse to serve a warrant?

Why? Because they knowed John Brown has got the Lord on his side."

Henry couldn't imagine Thomp standing up to Pap, but he certainly did. "Because old man Brown and his sons was so armed up it was dangerous, that's why!"

Pa acted for a minute as if he were sick. "Maybe the day will come, Thomp, when you'll be proud to claim kin to old John Brown. He's givin' Kansas a chance to vote free if they want. I do hope, Thomp, that nary one of my *sons* ever owns a slave."

Nate didn't get mad, but Relly suddenly left the table. Nobody but Ma paid any attention to her, because Relly was in a family way again and that made a woman act peculiar.

"If I'd been brought up in the North, Mr Brown," Nate said good-humoredly, "maybe I'd feel just like you about slaves. But to my notion, Bell and Jonah and the two men are better off as my slaves than the free niggers down Crooked River, starving so that they have to steal to keep alive."

Ma hurried right back with the apple pudding and started talking to Nate about these being the apples he'd sent over from his new trees.

The next year Ma couldn't change the subject when old John Brown actually came over into Missouri and took off a bunch of slaves and hid them in Kansas until he could get them started to Canada.

After that Nate and Relly always managed to have some other plans for Sunday dinners. Henry heard his ma cry about it.

"If your pa would only quit talkin' at the table about this slave business! He's insultin' to poor Nate. And him worried enough that somebody will come steal his slaves—and that's not all, they might even shoot him down like they did that David Cruise—no wonder Relly looks so peaked and worried all the time. I don't know what him and Relly'd do without them slaves."

"Now, Ma, don't you worry so!" Henry, taller now than his ma, patted her shoulder. "I'll take you over to Relly's to spend the day tomorrow."

"Bless you, Henry. I don't know what I'd do without you. With Thomp off gettin' ready to marry a Brookin' and Jim courtin' that Holtz woman and George already married—and Will and Mariar—for all I see of them they almost might be dead."

Henry felt too pained to look at Ma. Though Maria had gone over four years ago, he still blamed himself that she didn't write. It wasn't like Maria not to want to come home. They never heard from her except in some roundabout way—usually through Ed's folks. It hurt Ma worse than sickness to have to get the information before a quilting circle that her own daughter had just borne twins.

Ed's mother was coarse and old and always talked lewdly about birthin's. "I had Effie write to ask if any of them got away—two ain't all of that litter."

Henry knew just how his mother felt because Ed's little brother had said about the same thing that day at school.

"Ma, do you suppose Pa would let me take you to Kansas to see Mariar sometime? I'm big as a man now, bigger'n Thomp was at my age." Henry's voice was changing, and there was a golden fuzz on his upper lip.

"Oh, Henry, that would be fine, but I know your pa wouldn't hear of it. And anyhow Pa thinks Ed ort to make the first move to a reconcilin'. Kansas ain't safe for an old woman and a boy."

"That's crazy, Ma. Pa believes in religion and reads the Bible and goes to church on Sunday, and yet he ain't forgivin'."

"Henry Brown, hush your mouth." Ma whirled on him. Her blue eyes made him shrivel inside. "Them ain't no proper words for a son to say, and anyhow, your Pa's forgive' Ed, but as long as Ed don't come back and show he's sorry for runnin' off in a huff after your Pa had fit' him up to farmin' and give him money to buy land, what can he do?"

Henry sat down on a stool before the fire, his big hands dangling from his chapped wrists. He wished if Ed was ever going to get to be governor he'd get there quick, so as to fulfill Maria's dream, and then maybe they'd come home. He knew Ed never would come till he could make a show of some kind.

"You'd think two growed men would know better than to get mad over somethin' a little kid of ten would say. Sometimes I'm goin' to do somethin' about all this. Our family ort to live peaceable."

"There ain't no use, Henry. We won't ever be peaceable in this family till old John Brown and his boys have gone out of the country. I heard Bell scarin' little Ellery the other day that John Brown would get him and take him to Canada if he didn't be good. No, we won't have peace till he's caught and put behind bars."

II

BUT HENRY'S MOTHER WAS WRONG about peace with the Browns. Even though old John and his associates were on trial in Virginia for the raid on the Federal arsenal at Harper's Ferry in 1859, things weren't peaceable with the Browns in Missouri. Thompson was marrying Sara Brooking and in accepting his prospective father-in-law's wedding present had become a real slavocrat. Three slaves, valued at twenty-four hundred dollars, now belonged to red-headed Thompson Brown.

Pa was fit to be tied and threatened not to go to the wedding. He argued with Thomp till Thomp threatened to go to the Brookings and never darken his pa's door again as long as he lived.

Henry listened again in unbelief. Thomp was as tall as Pa and, standing before the fireplace, cast the whole room in shadow. The quilt frame, suspended from the ceiling at the end of the room, looked like a huge flower picture. Ma was making that for Thomp's wedding present.

Pa finally calmed down enough to promise he'd go to the

wedding rather than raise the dander of the whole Brooking outfit. After all poor Sary wasn't responsible for her bringing up.

Henry, at the wedding, decided that Sara's little sister Delia was the prettiest girl he ever saw. She had black eyes and black curls and could hold her own talking in any crowd. She kept her pa's little pickaninnies stepping to do just as she wanted, but mostly there was a crowd of older boys to do her orders. Henry felt awkward and gawky beside her, and yet nothing could persuade him to get out of her sight.

She'd probably like Hez Eagan. He was bold enough in a store suit he'd earned playing dance music at play parties, and though the Widder Patch still cut his hair under a bowl, it was black and silky, with enough curl to make it look barber cut. Hez was easy the best-looking boy on the floor. He knew how to dance, and he even had the gall to single out little nine-year-old Joycie from a cluster of giggling girls for a dance. Henry turned his back, only to run spang into Miss Delia Brooking. (She had shortened her own name from Cordelia.)

"Why don't you dance with me, Mr Henry Brown?" Delia asked him point-blank, when the music was loud and nobody could hear.

"Would you?" Henry's hands felt as big as beef livers and about as clammy.

"Try me!" Her voice was almost babyish. She looked more like a live doll than a person. She was too pretty and fine to be real. Her glistening black curls just came to Henry's breast pocket. He didn't know that in his own right he was handsome.

"B-but Miss Delia, you're a good dancer and I'm not." Henry felt like a balky mule.

Their formality was due to the fact that Delia had never gone to the log schoolhouse with Henry, but away to a ladies' seminary where she learned manners and, some said, a foreign language.

"You can't learn to dance any younger, Mr Henry Brown. You must be at least a year and a half older than me." She looked out of the corners of her eyes and tossed her head so her curls bobbed. Henry swung her to the music.

Her waist was so small that he knew he could span it with his two large hands, but he'd never dare. Dancing with her was like dancing with no weight at all, and to feel the silk of her dress gave him a sensation that he had never known before. It was nearest to touching bird's feathers or flower petals. He simply didn't dare let himself get to thinking about her or he might stumble and fall right here in the floor. She was so tiny he could have swung her over his shoulder or carried her in his arms from here to town and back without getting tired. He was flooded with thankfulness to something or somebody for the dancing, the music, but most of all for Delia. He felt humble and proud at the same time, and all at once knew how Pap, with all his six feet of size, must have felt towards Ma.

When they finished the dance, Delia took him to the punch bowl and, regardless of his father's warnings to stay away from it, Henry drank three glasses before his thirst was quenched. But tonight he was a man. A girl with gleaming black eyes, and lips that "did words proud" in saying them, had called him a man.

Henry's head felt light, and his hands and feet weren't

in the way. He pushed three boys out of the path when they wanted to dance with Delia.

"Oh, Mr Henry, are you trying to mon-monopolize *all* of my time?"

Henry couldn't for the life of him remember what that word meant, but he felt like a knight or a chieftain or maybe old John Brown himself at the peak of his glory.

Thus, Henry didn't suffer with Pa over the thought of old John Brown's being hanged before Christmas, for he was carving a basket for a thimble out of a black walnut shell. It was delicate work, and it must be perfect to please one so choicy as Miss Delia. Now, if he only had the knack with his hands that Hez Eagan had! Henry didn't really eat or sleep for days; he was simply living until circumstances made it possible for him to see his dream of a girl again. He scarcely heard Pa when he exalted through the house that old John Brown had refused to claim insanity so as to save his neck. Old John was a martyr all right. But Henry only got roused to fury when his older brothers teased him about being in love.

Relly put in her journal for December 30, 1859 (Henry read it one day when he had taken Ma over to see Relly and the children. It was lying on the table in plain sight, and he didn't think that it was a secret thing until he had started reading, and since it was about himself he felt justified in reading on to the end):

"This twelvemonth has made the greatest change in Henry of all the family. He has grown real handsome with his high 'Brown' forehead and Ma's deep blue eyes. His hair isn't exactly red, but it has a touch of copper.

I just hope Ellery will make as handsome a boy when he is that age."

Henry went to the mirror to see if he could see any of the things about himself that Relly had mentioned, but he was blushing so at his underhandedness that he looked red and gawky to his own eyes. But he couldn't lay down the diary in spite of his conviction of sin.

"Nate says Henry has taken a fatal liking to Thomp's little sister-in-law. Ma said she caught him hollowing out a walnut with his penknife, and he didn't give it to either Ma or me for Christmas.

"The babies are the most beautiful I have ever seen. Little Ellery is sturdy and quiet and so thoughtful, while Baby Joe is still in the dumpling stage. Yesterday he got into my knitting and pulled out over half a sock. The yarn is almost a total loss, but he didn't stick the needles in his eyes or mouth, for which, dear God, I am thankful. I wish I could say as much for our politics. I believe I'm going to have another baby—the good Lord willing, let it be a girl."

By Christmas of 1860, poor Relly's diary would be very different, for South Carolina had withdrawn from the Union and Nate decided to make a hurried trip back home to find out how things really were. Since that awful Mr Lincoln had won the election, no telling what might happen. The baby was another boy, and Relly actually forgot she had wanted a girl, or at least, Henry asked her one day if she didn't think it would have been nice to have one girl and she said no, she preferred boys.

There was the noise of the returning women in the passage.

"Hurry, Henry, the fire!" The gay Delia started a scolding monologue that gave excuse for her red face, while Henry baked his own face before the flames in an effort to build a fire that would suit this little fury who commanded him.

He wanted to laugh, it was so smart of her to act up this way.

"At last there's someone who can make Henry build a roaring fire," Relly teased.

"Oh, Delia seems always to get her own way," Mrs Brooking said, "but you needn't take it so seriously, Henry, her bark is so much worse than her bite."

Henry had to duck his head to keep from meeting Delia's eyes, for then he was sure he would give the whole thing away.

"I tell her if she don't want to be an old maid she'd better put a curb on that tongue of hers."

The guilty Delia only tossed her head so that shadows of her curls threaded across her rosy cheeks. She said she'd risk it.

When Nate came home in January, it wasn't so easy for Delia and Henry to see each other, but as the weather opened up they rode places together on their horses. Henry rode a colt from his father's fine mare (by Prince the sire of some of the best horses in the county). Delia rode her own chestnut horse that had cost four hundred dollars at an auction in Leavenworth.

War seemed far away to them, though they heard noth-

ing else in their respective homes. "If South Carolina and the rest want to secede, it's their privilege," Mr Brooking argued, noisily thumping the table so that a slave always came running to see what he wanted. "And Missouri ought to be the next one to join them. If Governor Jackson has his way we'll be sending our senators to the new capital at Montgomery."

Mr Brown paced the floor and said he'd fight with arms himself before he'd see Missouri seceded from the Union. "My pap fought the British in '76, my oldest brother in 1812. I ain't aimin' to let what they built up go to rack for want of a little assistance!"

Today Henry chewed his food slightly and swallowed it without knowing what he had eaten, for Delia had promised to ride home with him from town if he got there at two o'clock. Of course she'd have nigger Tapp with her, but Tapp would ride out of earshot, and Henry and Delia could talk for five miles through the April sunshine.

Henry's colt, Sorghum, was in a lather when he reached town, but nobody seemed to think it strange, for the hitch rack was full of horses in such a state.

"Bless my soul, if it ain't Arn Brown's youngest boy." It was one of the men on the street from out Crooked River way who greeted Henry. "But, son, this war will be over before you're old enough to fight."

"I wouldn't be too sure, Pop. When a Southern gentleman makes up his mind he's hard to convince."

"Don't be a fool!" Delia's oldest brother looked hot and mad. "We've as much right to secede as you have to keep us. This country is too big, anyhow."

Henry soon realized that the war had really come, and that President Lincoln had sent out a call for volunteers. A war . . . Nate had said there wouldn't be any, because the North would just have to let the Confederacy form a government of their own . . . peace on all sides.

The boy became so interested in listening that he almost forgot meeting Delia. She would be as mad as hops and he'd better hurry. But when he got to the dry-goods store where Delia was to go after taking her music lesson (as if to buy some ribbon), he found Delia talking hotly to a group of girls.

"He'd never dare!" Her high babyish voice smote Henry with humility. How had he ever managed to get her promised to him?

"Why, we'll simply refuse to let our men go to fight in his old army, and they'll all run away from home rather than be conscripted, or go to Montgomery to join up right."

She was so beautiful and positive, Henry could hardly keep his face straight when he bought the spool of cotton for his mother, so that Delia could have time to come with him.

"And you wait and see, Luella Logan, if Governor Jackson doesn't tell Mr Lincoln where he can stop off! Montgomery is a proper capital, anyway!"

Delia had absorbed more politics than he had, Henry decided.

"Montgomery! Why, it's hogwash compared to Washington," Luella Logan, the daughter of the leading abolitionist in town, said. "And you're a slavocrat, Delia Brook- ing! Look at that poor Tapp nigger out there holding your horse!"

Henry looked. Tapp seemed pretty comfortable, sitting on the curb chewing slippery-elm bark.

Delia turned with vigor, and with her chin in the air marched towards the door. "I'd like to know what you'd do with all the slaves if they were free. Let them starve, I suppose, or else marry them."

Henry wanted to laugh at the seriousness of the whole argument. Women should keep out of politics. But Delia could still hold her own in any crowd. He was so proud of her that he bought a card of red buttons for which he had no earthly use just because they looked so brave. Delia was the finest girl he had ever known, and she was promised to him.

Delia and Tapp had reached the town limits when he caught up.

"A lot of help you were!" Delia stormed at him.

"Why, Delia, I figgered you didn't need help. You handled that ugly Luella Logan like a regular lawyer." He had to touch up his horse to keep beside Delia.

"Fiddlesticks! She probably thinks you agreed with her."

"I'm not goin' to burn down the tracks gettin' to Montgomery to enlist, if that's what you mean," Henry said.

"Who asked you to? Anyway, your pa wouldn't *let* you! Why, he won't even let you get married."

Henry's face reddened. He had no answer. This was so different from the way he had planned it. They should be walking their horses the whole five miles, talking about each other, sometimes holding hands when they turned a bend ahead of Tapp. The April day with its fresh new leaves and tender grass and silk blue sky seemed wasted.

It might as well be blistering July or bone-freezing November and a drizzle.

He let the silence grow up between them for so long that he knew he could never break through it. Why didn't she say something, or why couldn't he say to her, "Let 'em fight, we don't need to"? But he knew that would not be enough for Delia.

At last she could stand no more silence. "For mercy's sake, Henry Brown, are you deaf and dumb?"

"No, but I think we're spoilin' a good ride arguin' about somethin' that ain't any of our business."

"Henry Brown! Our business! Here you're goin' on seventeen and a war in your front yard and you say it's none of your business. I suppose next you'll be tellin' me you wouldn't fight if it was on our doorstep."

"Don't get mad, Delia, though it is mighty becomin', and please don't run your horse so." He had to shout to make himself heard.

She pulled up suddenly. "So you think now that you can even tell me how to ride my own horse."

Henry felt whipped. "No, I was thinkin' of my own horse. I run him all the way to town, and if I run him all the way home he'll be too tired and Pa'll be mad."

"Oh!" Delia flounced in her saddle. "Pa, Pa, Pa, that's all you can say. What kind of man is your pa? Why can't you be like Thomp and show a little spunk? I bet if your pa told you to go out and butcher up five innocent slave-owners, you'd do it just like old John Brown's sons!"

"No, I wouldn't!" Henry was suddenly weak in the stomach. He had always had a horror of the Pottawatomie murders.

"You'd believe slave or free the way he said." She started to walk her horse because Tapp had caught up with them, and Henry always wanted to ride fast then.

"You believe the way your pa does. It's always the way you grow up," Henry argued.

"Grow up! You're not grown up yet! And besides, if my pa believed in free I'd still believe in slaves. How in the world do you expect Tapp would take care of himself if we didn't sleep him and feed him in return for what he can do for us?"

"He might work for himself."

"Oh! How could I! Imagine being promised to a black abolitionist! Henry Brown, I hope I don't ever see you again in my whole life. And you needn't run your precious horse to keep up with me!" She rode off in a rage that seemed to float back to Henry in the slight dust that her horse kicked up.

Henry wondered if he dared follow to make her change her mind. He didn't know what to say. He couldn't beg when his voice might break. She had no idea what she had meant to him. Here he was, the son of a plain farmer who did all his own work and whose wife tended her own garden and wove the cloth for her family's clothes, and he had been promised to Delia Brooking, the prettiest girl in the county, who had been back to Virginia to a seminary. She had never worn homespun in her life, always store clothes, and always had slaves to see that she didn't get her hands dirty. And Delia herself was like the silks and fine woolens she wore, not really of this part of the country at all.

Down South, where her father had come from, they

raised cotton and had big plantations and hundreds of slaves, but in Missouri, where it was too cold for cotton, they raised tobacco, corn and stock, and it didn't take many slaves to keep things moving.

He looked down at his large hands on the bridle. He had worked as hard as any slave. He had even helped at harvest and hog killing. He was coarse and common compared to Delia, though he did ride a good horse (he paused to stroke Sorghum's foam-colored mane), and Pa was probably as well off as the Brookings. The Browns were good workers, they lived in a good house and ate common food, but there wasn't a fine thing about them, except maybe Relly.

An awful shame poured over Henry. Maybe Delia had been sorry for him all the time, and just trifling with him to see what he would do and say. Her folks could look farther for a husband for her than for Thomp's wife, because she was so much prettier. Thomp became a Southern gentleman when he married. He believed the way Mr Brooking believed now. Henry wondered if it wasn't because he got so much out of the Brookings, those slaves and that place to live on. And then Henry felt ashamed, for Thomp wasn't that kind of person. He really believed, he had spunk, that was where Thomp was different. He never invited Ma and Pa over for Sunday dinner. Maybe he was ashamed of Ma's pipe or Pa's quick manners. It wasn't right to hold any human in bondage. But it was right to love one woman, and love her till you died.

And she had ridden off and left him alone on the road, her little hands in soft kid gloves, tight on the reins, her back straight as a gun barrel. Why hadn't he said he'd believe

anything she told him to? Now he would probably have to be an old bachelor like Will, or marry somebody five years older as Jim had done when he married Vida Holtz, or some girl like Luella Logan with teeth that kept her lips parted in a perpetual gape.

He would never do that, he promised himself, not the last! If he couldn't have Delia . . . if he couldn't have Delia . . . ! He whipped Sorghum to run away from his grief.

When he came in sight of home, there was a dilapidated wagon drawn up in front. Could it be time for Jolas? But this wasn't his wagon, this was for two horses, and a different kind of load. As Henry came closer he could see children playing beside the wellhouse. Neighbors, he supposed, but who? He dismounted slowly and tied his horse to the stile block. Mercy on us, but that team there had seen plenty of hard work, and mighty little extra feed. And then he heard:

"Why, Henry, I'll vow, I don't believe he knows me." A woman came walking heavily towards him from the kitchen door. The three children ran to her and further hampered her progress.

Two of the children looked exactly alike.

Then Henry knew the woman was Maria, and these were her twins and little Hannah.

"So this is little Hank."

Henry felt strange kissing her. There were a few strands of gray hair mingled with her once-bright chestnut, her skin looked dry and rough, and her small short-nailed hands were knobby from work. He was glad Delia was not with him. Then instantly he was ashamed of his meanness.

"Are these your children?" he asked to make talk.

"Yes. Children, shake hands with your uncle Henry. Hannar, what have you been eatin'? Here, twins, this is Ed-die and this is Frank." But they were as afraid as quails and hid behind their mother.

Henry recognized with further shame that Maria was about to have another addition to her family.

"Does it seem possible it's been a little over six years since you helped me pack up right here?" She sounded forced in her happiness. "And now you're a young man. I left a little boy and find a tall grown man with hair on his chest."

Henry felt his face get hot. Maria had coarsened like Ed and Ed's family. He wanted to stop this personal conversation with this woman he hardly knew, and yet he was forced by blood kinship to protect her and love her everlastingly. He tried to take the hand of one of the twins to relieve his sister of the added drag, but was turned away.

The children had colds and looked underfed, like all the Griffie children. He thrust the pair of words back into his mind before they crossed his lips. The words which had driven Ed from the Brown home several hours before he had planned to go, and had kept him from letting his wife write to her people all these years.

"But where's Ed?" Henry wished he could recall the words the moment they were out. What if Ed was dead, killed in some Kansas trouble, or gone off with some other woman?

But Maria's flash of pride was his first glimpse of the real sister he had known. "Oh, Ed's gone with a regiment to answer the President's call. We got word at Lawrence day before yesterday. He went right off."

Henry hated Ed worse than when as a child he had flailed into the black whiskers. Yes, Ed would do a thing like that, leave his wife so he could go off and be a hero. His wife about to have a fourth heir in less than seven years. Henry was shaken with a new tenderness for Maria. He knew he would protect her always.

"Same old Mariar." He put his arm around her shoulders; he couldn't tell her in words that he understood her necessity to follow some dream, but he knew it. The faraway glory in her eyes, the uplifted chin were just as they had been the day she'd dreamed Ed might be governor. And Ed, now off on what she thought a holy war, had skipped out on his responsibilities with glory. Henry wished he could talk to Delia about the war in that way.

Delia! The thought lashed about him like a whip about an unruly horse.

"Now you're home, Hank," this strange woman said, "I wish you'd unhook and tend to the horses. I was just too plumb beat out to do it when I got in. We drove from Leavenworth today, that's about thirty-five miles, I'd say. I promised Ed I'd do it."

Henry looked at her to marvel. Thirty-five miles with two such horses and three children to look after. Henry knew the distance well, because he had helped Pa drive his hogs to Leavenworth more than once. But he'd never made the distance in a wagon, always on foot or horseback for the return. Why, this woman had more spunk than any man he knew.

"You must be wore out then, Mariar. Hadn't you better go have Ma give you somethin' to eat and go to bed?" It was strange for Henry to be so considerate. He wondered

if it was to get her out of sight, so that he could get the old laughing Maria with her bright chestnut hair and quick brown hands back into his mind.

"Oh, I'm all right. We've already had ginger cookies and milk—that's more than they's used to. The children ain't willin' to let me out of their sight, so I guess I'll stay up awhile longer. Anyhow, Ma's busy makin' up beds."

Henry went inside. The trundle bed was in the middle of the bedroom just off the kitchen, and Ma was shaking out covers.

"Yes, they're back, and jist as I'd somehow always feared," Ma said without looking directly at Henry. "Your pa and Joycie are off tryin' to trade Joycie's pony for a horse."

Henry knew she was dreading for Pa to come home. Henry bet Pa wouldn't have Maria sleeping in his bed more than one night. Pa wasn't one to want his habits changed.

"It may make some difference that Ed joined up with the Union. I didn't even know Lincoln had sent out a call for men."

"Neither did I till I got to town." Henry felt sore again, but for once he seemed to know that his own grief was not of first rank compared to Ma's right now.

Ma finished tucking in the covers on the trundle bed, and Henry helped her push it back where it belonged. "Joycie won't like sleeping upstairs, but I guess she'll have to pretend she does. She'd ort to be able to help with the children. Poor little Joycie, she's never had to do anythin' she didn't want to, and maybe that's a good thing, for my oldest has had to do so much that's hard. I'm goin' to put

her here in our bed and make Pa go somewheres else to sleep tonight. He'll raise sand."

But from the look of Ma's neat little mouth, Henry knew Pa would not argue, though he might grumble in his beard.

Henry went upstairs to change his clothes before he went to unhook Maria's team. The poor bony creatures looked almost worse than their driver, but like her, they still showed signs of spirit.

As he was rubbing them down, Joycie came riding into the barn on a new horse, whooping for Henry to look, look. The horse was small as horses go, but it was a fine light sorrel with three white feet and a star on its forehead.

"She cost a hundred dollars boot!" Joycie bragged as she slid off. Her thick lower lip stuck out. "But where did those awful nags come from, and this wagon? Couldn't be Jolas, could it?" Her blue eyes brightened and her lip went back into place, for Pa always bought her something nice when Jolas came, though she certainly had no call to expect anything more on this day after the new horse.

Henry told her about Maria and the children.

"Stinkin' little brats, I bet." But her chubby pink face with the puckered nose made her words funny instead of wicked. "I can't even remember Mariar. Ain't it funny to have a sister you have to love that you ain't ever seen?"

Henry agreed that it was. "Where's Pap?"

"He sent me on home from the corner. He had to see a man." Joycie was using the horse brush on her new mare's rump.

"I saw Hez Eagan today." Joycie changed the subject as she came around to practice getting on and off her horse from a box of seed corn.

Henry looked up quickly. Joycie at eleven, with her shingled hair and her tomboy ways, had no business talking about somebody as old as Henry himself.

"He brought around a man who wanted to buy Ginger. Listen, Hank" (now Henry knew he was going to learn why Joycie's mouth was in a pout), "I don't see why I couldn't keep Ginger too, but Pap says all a pony does is eat its head off. But Hank——"

And then Hank stopped rubbing Maria's stiff-kneed team and came around to the new horse and sat beside Joycie on the seed-corn box. Now she made no effort to hide her tears, but threw herself into Henry's arms and cried on his shirt until he could feel the hot wet tears on his skin.

"He'd always been such a good pony, and only threw me off when somebody got on behind and kicked him in the flanks." Joycie sobbed so loud that even her new horse seemed disturbed.

"But you don't need him now! You ain't no circus queen and able to ride two at a time. Anyway, imagine tryin' to keep one foot way up on this horse and the other way down on Ginger." Henry heard himself chuckle. This wasn't Henry talking, the Henry who was ashamed of himself and his family, and wanted Delia more than heaven and earth. This was Joycie's big brother Hank. It was good sometimes to be more than one body; he'd seen Ma the time she'd wanted to go to Kentucky to see her mother on her deathbed, and Pa thought they couldn't afford for Ma to go. Ma didn't keep crying, or take to her bed. She just got out a big kittle of cracklings and cooked off a batch of soap. And she stirred it every time herself, never once let any of them help. Like one of the Brookings' niggers—

walking back and forth with her head bent down, and her arms limp at her sides except when she mended the fire or stirred the soap, and they didn't dare ask her anything, for she looked like anybody but herself. And yet, that night at supper, she had sat at the table in her clean white apron as if she had just come back from a long journey.

Poor little Joycie, she hadn't learned to switch her mind over to something else yet, and make herself somebody else. Henry wished he had the money to go buy back her pony. He couldn't understand Pap, who loved Joycie more than any of the other children and yet wouldn't let her keep that pony and a horse, too.

"It ain't that. Will they be good to Ginger?" All at once Henry realized Joycie was enjoying her grief, for it was so noisy. It wasn't like Ma's or like his own, even.

"You'd better get your face straightened up so you can go in to see Mariar and her kids. Them young 'uns is as scared as partridges, and you'll probably have to learn a lot of tricks to get them to like you."

"Do you suppose"—Joycie was all wet lashes and china-blue eyes, until her round mouth spread into a grin—"I could get Pap to buy that pony back for Mariar's children?"

But she didn't even have to ask him, for when Pa came back that night, he had Ginger with him. He had driven back to the sale and bought the pony.

Henry's suspicions were right. Ma and Pa were too old to be crowded up with Maria and her family, and Joycie, not quite twelve, had ideas of her own, so Pa fixed up the little house across the road that he had first built for George, before George got a farm of his own down Crooked River

way. Henry moved his things over to Maria's loft so as to be there within call at nights if needed.

He didn't like this. Maria wasn't a good housekeeper, and he had a feeling of camping out. Maybe Maria should not have been blamed, for Henry knew she was tired and didn't feel so well. A man shouldn't have to take over another man's family while that man was off making a hero of himself. Many mornings Henry got up, still tired after his night of fitful sleep, and went over to his mother's for breakfast so as to get an early start in the field. The work was heavy now since George had moved. It left everything to Henry and his father and a field hand. But even the hand didn't last; he went off to war before corn was laid by. A man wouldn't mind if he could do all that work for a wife and family of his own. Delia with her laughing ways haunted Henry day and night, Delia with her scorn lashed him awake or asleep. He was glad he was only seventeen, for then he wouldn't have to worry about deciding to go to war himself.

Why did everybody have to go crazy this way? Why couldn't they let the South go on and secede and let life go on as it had started out, peaceable, easy? But even the governor of the state was going off hotheaded without the sanction of the legislature. Governor Claiborne Jackson had put Price in charge of the army of the state for the secessionists, while Lyon and Blair were in charge of the Missouri Federals. Thomp left his wife and went off hot-headed to join with Price, while Jim went to Blair. What if they should meet in a battle? Thomp would sure kill Jim, because he was so much quicker. Brothers oughtn't to fight against each other. For years Thomp and Jim had

slept together in the north room. Thomp had told Jim first thing when he found he was going to marry Sara Brooking. Jim never got out of patience with Thomp's temper.

Henry's only consolation was that they didn't have any children to come back to live with the Browns. He thought he simply couldn't stand any more children. If Maria's had only been Relly's he could have stood it better, but they were scrawny and timid. A child of Delia's would have been full of life and handsome. Whenever Relly brought Joe and Ellery and little Dan over for Sunday dinner, now that Nate was off in South Carolina with the army of the Confederacy, Maria's children looked more than ever like something wild beside barnyard flocks. Henry paid them as little heed as he could, hoping they would keep their distance.

One day, after a rain, he saw Hannah staring into the woods. In a moment of generosity he asked her to go for a walk with him. She was thin and small for six, with wide hazel eyes and fine brown hair that lay close to her head like a skullcap.

She held hotly to his hand, as if she were afraid to let go.

"Why, Hannar?"

"Don't like woods. Boogers live there."

Poor little young 'un, she was trembling. Henry put her on his back and galloped until she actually giggled. He had been too hard on Maria's children because he didn't like Ed. Why, Hannah might be a fine kid for all he knew. He'd teach her things Ellery had taught him. He'd been too wrapped up in Delia, too anxious to get a glimpse of her, too ready to contrast poor Maria to her.

"We'll go to the woods and find if there's a ripe May apple left. Maybe there'll be strawberries somewhere." He didn't feel silly talking this way to Hannah.

It had been over a year since he had come to the woods just for fun. Maybe he had lost something here that he needed to find again. It ought to be easier with this big-eyed little partridge on his shoulder. Pity she was so ugly. Joycie had always been such a dumpling of a kid, pudgy-faced and as gay as a squirrel. He'd grown to think all little girls were full of laughs and chatter. But here was a different one, as shy as a deer with big, scared eyes.

"Ain't you tired?" Hannah asked. "I'm big."

So Hannah got down and walked beside him, her bare feet discovering cool green moss in the deep woods. "Why didn't you tell me it was like this?"

Henry caught his breath. She had her mother's eyes after all. She wasn't ugly when she looked up at you. She made Joycie look common and fat. She seemed to know you should speak soft in the woods. He showed her how to sit against a tree till the birds thought she was a part of it, so that she wouldn't mind resting. He showed her the spring and how to get a drink without riling the water. He made her listen for a rabbit's hop and a squirrel's bark. Perhaps he should have brought his gun along so as to get a squirrel for Maria's supper, but after all little Hannah might be scared of a killing and not want to come back with him.

He was surprised at how anxious he was to make her smile. What had got into him? Here he was showing off before this wild little body because he couldn't stand the sight of her scared pinched face. But this was better than going to

church and standing about in hopes of catching a glimpse of Delia.

Suddenly he realized that Hannah was sitting at the foot of the very tree where Ellery had fallen. She was using the roots like arms of a chair. This was the first time Henry had sat beside that tree since he took off his little coonskin and put it under Ellery's head. But it had been fall then, and acorns thick in the sun and shade.

"I'm so glad you like me now, Uncle Henry. I hope you don't ever go to fight and leave me." It was the first time he had ever heard her speak his name.

Henry's throat hurt.

To fight and leave her! He remembered his vow, and his fingers hurt with the remembered digging of the ground as he buried the third squirrel. When he looked down at his hands they were clenched. He had promised never to kill a man, but he had got a man hanged. What if he went to war? He was swept by a swift sickness as of the ague—and he saw a little bandy-legged man swing at the end of a rope.

"It's time to go home, Hannar. We'll come back sometime next Sunday, if you want."

"I like you better than anybody that ever lived in the world."

Her praise shamed Henry.

It was autumn when Henry heard Delia was planning to marry Nate's youngest brother. Henry knew then that he must never again see Delia. After all, he had his hands full. Maria's new baby had the colic most of the time, and she was more than ever too tired to keep things up about the house. Many nights, after gathering corn all day, he walked

the floor with the baby. But no matter how tired he was by Sunday, he kept his promise to take Hannah to the woods.

Today he had promised they should gather walnuts for winter, but he had not planned to find Delia standing in the middle of the clearing with a tow sack over her arm. Her father owned dozens of walnut trees, why had she come here?

"Oh," Delia turned about quickly and dropped her sack. "I—I thought I was sure of being alone here."

"Delia!" Henry could not look his fill. She was more beautiful than he had remembered her. She stood there in a brown riding habit of fine wool, a hat that almost covered her black curls, her head bent down so that her eyes did not have to meet his.

Roughly he released his hand from Hannah's grasp and strode towards Delia. "It's been too long, Delia. I've near died without you." He could say so much because he had thought of her so many times, just like this, coming to him.

Delia sat down in a heap and started crying. "I—I knew you were coming here, Henry. I had Tapp spy on you so I could meet you face to face."

Henry sat down on the ground beside her. Tears filled his own eyes, but he was not ashamed.

"Don't make me have to marry Jerm Hubbard, Henry."

"Who said I would?"

"You did when you said you wouldn't go against your pa's wishes."

"What wishes?"

"Oh, Henry, can't you see? You easy pass for eighteen. Go and join up with General Price and the army of the South and marry me tomorrow."

"And go to war?"

"Of course, if you love me."

Henry was sitting not ten feet from the squirrel rock. And the sun shone through the oak leaves and made a spot of brightness at the foot of the oak tree just as Ellery's hair had done—a bubble came to Ellery's lips, and it was red and burst like any other bubble, only there was no more breath left in his mouth.

"Delia, did you ever see a man die?"

"Of course, I never. But it's something you have to be brave enough to do . . . if you're a man," she flung at him.

He had to look away from her eyes to keep from taking her in his arms. It was so right that he should love Delia. "I guess I'm not a man then, for I don't ever intend to kill another man." Henry had not so much as touched her hands, and yet he felt his heart racing as if to burst his chest. This was not what he had felt when they had danced together: humility and thankfulness for her perfection. This was something that had grown up in him while he took care of Maria's children and thought of Delia as he lay in the loft alone. He was so close he could see each fine little black hair that curled out over her collar; he could see the color come and go in her neck.

"You mean you'll not fight!" Delia faced him, her gloved hands bracing her, deep to the wrists in leather-brown oak leaves. He saw the quick pulse in her throat at the V of her neck. Her lips curled redder in scorn. He could lean forward and press his mouth to hers. What was a promise to a dead man compared to a live woman? God help Ellery if he died without ever knowing a moment like this.

Henry swayed forward and took her in his arms. She

came to him as if her arms were made on purpose to circle just his neck. "I'd do anything for you." He was breathing her breath now. "I've been dead myself since April."

Her skin was as fine as her clothes. She wasn't anything like the Browns. She was finer stuff, but he didn't care, she was made for him.

And then Delia shrieked: "Henry, that child!"

What child?

"Oh, my darling, quick."

The horror in Delia's eyes forced him to look. He was on his feet racing towards the tree to which she pointed. Hannah was dangling with a single hand from the upper branches of an elm tree.

Henry took a deep breath to make his voice sound steady. He had completely forgotten Hannah. "Stop that showin' off, Hannar, and come down out of that tree."

"I—I cain't," she quavered weakly.

"Hold tight! Look, Delia, stand here." He pulled her to her feet roughly. "If she falls, manage to break it somehow."

Henry climbed like an animal, his boots rasping on the bark like claws. "Hold tight, honey." If that child of Ed's dropped to her death, it was his fault. He'd have killed another person. Hanged another one. "O God, hold her." His hands, though toughened from field work, were bleeding when he at last reached her.

She dropped in his arms and clung about his neck, weeping. "I—I don't like hanging. It's worse than playing drowned."

The bushwhackers had taken a farmer out and hanged him, and the family had talked of nothing else for days. Henry braced himself against the tree and tried to hold her

away from her own fright. She wept on his neck, "But you were going away to leave me."

A moment ago he had held that other form. His mind had been filled with thoughts that he could not even repeat to himself, and he had been willing to pay a price. More than he could afford, just like men who went to St Louis with cattle and came home broke.

"Hurry down, Henry," Delia called up impatiently.

"She's got to stop her crying first. Listen, honey, we can't stay up here all day."

This was not the Henry who had promised to do anything for Delia. His tone had changed. It was tender and gentle as a woman's though as deep as a man's.

There was blood on Hannah's forehead where he had smoothed back her hair with his torn hands. It was his own blood, though.

Delia seemed to know before he said a word that he wouldn't join General Price with Thomp. She told him so.

"I've got these kids and Mariar on my hands, anyway. I guess I'm not man enough to kill another man, even for you, Delia." He did not let his eyes wander to her face or down her throat, but looked out across the top of her head to the tree with the chair roots.

That night, as he sat in front of his mother's fire, an untasted glass of sweet cider in his bandaged hands, he heard his mother talk to him:

"You mustn't take it so to heart, Henry. Hit'll soon be over and you can still marry Delia if you're a-mind to. This can't last long."

She spoke through puffs at her clay pipe. The smoke

ringed her face, setting it apart in the quiet room. (Pap had taken Joycie to a school festival.) Ma was fifty-one, but to Henry that was very old. He could not remember her as young. His throat filled with pity for her. "She's tryin' to talk down the wind," he thought, "she's afeard Thomp and Jim might even kill each other on different sides."

"Delia'll see reason when the war's over, Henry."

"No, she'll marry Jerm Hubbard, Ma, 'cause I won't join up with Gen'r'l Price." He told her that much; little Hannah wouldn't tell her any more.

"I should say you ortn't go to Price. Thomp 'bout broke your pap's heart goin' South. Pa expects you to go North come summer an' you're eighteen." She wiped her eyes with a square of cotton from the pocket in her skirt. "I asked him couldn't I keep you with me, but, Henry, your pa's made of stronger stuff than me. He thinks all his sons ain't too many to give to his country. Thomp ain't one of his sons now, but you can't cut a child off from his mother's heart. He's just another of her own hearts beatin' outside of her."

It was a warming thought to Henry.

"I know before anybody tells me when one of my children is in trouble, so you might as well not try to keep things from me. No son of mine could ever be lost in action, without I'd know it. The minute he died, I'd feel the blow. Any proper mother would."

In June of '62, the atmosphere grew more tense every day. Henry's father, after corn was laid by, asked Henry if he hadn't better make up his mind. "Nary son of mine

is goin' to be drafted, and there's talk there'll be a draft come July."

Henry did not answer his pa, but all that night he walked in the woods. He had no prize like Delia for deciding to fight. Delia had married Jeremiah Hubbard, who had a commission in the Southern army.

There was no moon, but the stars were bright. It was warm, and the night sounds had never been so sweet to Henry's ears. The sad lost call of the whippoorwill made him think, "What if I should blow the heart out of some mother?" . . . No, it was men he would fight. It would be the heart out of some man who liked those night sounds, or who loved a woman, or who liked the feel of ground under his feet and stars over his head.

He bumped over fallen logs and scratched his face on brambles; he sat down beside a shallow pond and was stung by mosquitoes; he lay flat on the ground until his bones ached—but all this physical pain was as nothing to the gnawing to his mind. At daybreak he found himself beside the rock where he had buried the squirrel.

He found himself kneeling beside it, his hands tearing at the stone. He wouldn't do it. He couldn't do it. Pa read the Bible every day, and he knew the Ten Commandments, and yet he couldn't see why he, Henry, would not fight. Henry knew it wasn't because of the Ten Commandments, but because he had seen Ellery die, and he had promised.

Relly's husband and Thomp might be the ones he'd shoot. The niggers at Nate's and Brookings' were content enough, and besides Nate's were his property. If they had to be freed, why not spend the money they were spending on war to buy them all up? Lincoln was supposed to be a

smart man. Why couldn't he think of some scheme to settle this without blowing people to pieces? A part of Ma's heart. . . . "O God, I can't do it!" he moaned aloud in the darkness.

He couldn't tell Pa. There was only one thing he could do. All night he had been trying to run away from the thought, but it was still there. . . .

Henry waited in the clump of alders until he saw his mother go down to the springhouse. Once she'd caught him fighting there with Hez Eagan—Hez was two years older and half a head taller.

He slipped in behind her. Between the sounds of the slaps of his mother's butter paddle and the purling of the water around the crocks Henry told his mother:

"I can't do it, Ma." He stood back of her and looked at the curls at the back of her neck. "Even animals don't go around killin' each other. Even hogs."

"I know."

"Pa won't listen."

"I know." Henry's mother kept patting the butter, though Henry knew she couldn't see.

"Would you talk to him?"

"I can't, Henry. Pap's set against slavery. He's awful set. He maybe won't ever forgive you, even if you did have three hundred dollars to buy your way out."

"I ain't but barely eighteen—the draft ain't but a threat yet—"

"I know, but your pa."

Now Henry was saying, "I know."

"His father fought in the Revolution to make this nation, and that's how he got his farm in Ohio. His oldest brother

fought in the next war—and two other brothers without families fought in Mexico. He cain't stand for ary one of his boys not to hold it together. Thomp's goin' South about kilt your pappy."

"Ever' other generation there's a big war. Pap's too old to go."

"You ain't plannin' on just tellin' him you cain't fight? You're able-bodied."

"Yes, I'm tellin' him I cain't fight. I cain't kill Thomp or Nate or Delia's brothers or ary man alive."

He sat down on an upturned keg.

"You might join up with the home guards."

"Only old men and men with families too big to leave, and they'd all kill if'n they had to."

"There's Ed's family, you could get exemption maybe."

"Yes, but Ed's brother home now with just one eye can take care of them."

Ma had finished working the butter.

"There's only one thing. I got a horse and forty dollars."

"Oh, Henry, you ain't aimin' to run away?"

"I guess so, Ma."

"You ain't afeared, Henry?"

"You know it ain't that. From what I hear of Canada it's not too safe, but I know I cain't kill a man or even hurt him so's he'd be like Ed's brother the rest of his life. I aim to start to Canada as soon as the wheat is cut. It's early this year. That west forty will do to cut day after tomorrow."

President Lincoln called for three hundred thousand men on July 2. Missouri and the other states would get into action at once. Ten days later, when the wheat was all cut

and shocked, Henry left. He did not tell his father or even Relly. He did tell Maria, because he had to get his things out of her loft and she had to make plans for Ed's brother to stay with her and the children. Joycie was staying with Relly; she'd ridden her horse over that morning. She was wanting another horse by now—one bigger and swifter—but horses were getting scarce. She'd probably be more sorry to know he'd gone off on his horse and thus taken him out of the family than that he himself was gone.

Maria gave Henry scorn for the first time in her life. "I didn't think it of you, Hank. A coward in the Brown family is somethin' new. I guess Hannar'll about break her little heart for you, but I won't poison her mind. I'll do that much."

Maria stood in the center of the cluttered room, the dirty, sniveling baby on her hip. The twins were in a trundle bed before the dead fireplace; they did not smell fresh. Little Hannah was coiled like a kitten in the middle of her mother's big feather bed. These children had been his responsibility for over a year, and he hated to leave them. He knew they would never thank him for anything he had ever done, except maybe Hannah. He wanted to kiss her.

"If you had a wife and children that couldn't git along without you, it would be different, but look at Ed!"

Henry wanted to say how well he knew what Ed had done, but instead he kissed his sister and received a dutiful but grudging response. He would not let himself look towards the bed where Hannah lay. He could feel her hand tight in his when she thought "boogers" lived in the

woods. He could see her pointed little face puckered over her first green persimmon.

"There'll be war for the twins someday too, if somethin' ain't done," Henry said so that Maria could hear, as he went out the door.

"Well, heaven hope they'll face it like their pa."

III

HENRY DIDN'T FEEL GUILTY taking his horse, Sorghum. He felt he deserved something. This horse, the forty dollars, an 1857 cavalry gun, besides a change of clothes, the saddlebags Ma had packed, and the hickory-colored blanket was all he carried away. Thomp and the other boys got a thousand dollars when they were married and left home.

He wondered forlornly if he would ever marry, or if he would ever come back again.

There was dust in the lane, and he walked his horse as he passed the house so as not to wake Pa. The candle in the pantry window let Henry know Ma hadn't dared come out to kiss him good-by again. The light blurred and split into a thousand facets. He didn't want to steal away like a thief. He wanted to turn his horse back and go climb the ladder to Maria's loft, and tomorrow watch Ma smoke her pipe, and ask Pa what he wanted done in the south forty. Canada was so far away and so cold in winter that the very thought of it made the pit of Henry's stomach feel as if he had swallowed a rock.

Maybe he was a fool. He knew he was! He could have gone off like a hero to enlist at St Joseph. That is, if it hadn't been for Ellery and the squirrels. He wished it *had* been Thomp' who had seen Ellery die.

Henry's shoulders sagged with the weight of bereavement. He had cut himself off from all his kin. He might as well be dead. Down the lane he went to the big road as if to his own funeral—or better, his grave—at the end.

He had reached the main road, and was still sunk in his grief, when he saw a figure dodge into the bushes at the side. A sudden terror swept up Henry's spine and made it stiff again. This was only the beginning. Bushwhackers were thick. They robbed and killed without regard for rights of other people. What if he'd lose his horse and saddlebags and have to go back home tomorrow? Almost a wishful fear sprang to his sick thoughts. He gave his horse a quick prod in the flank that sent him *leaping* forward, but not fast enough. A figure rose from the bushes and swung onto the bridle. Sorghum lunged and pawed, and then stopped with a startled whinny.

"Get off that horse."

"You make me." Henry was as surprised at his response as he had been at the figure, and then as from his subconscious mind came, "Hez Eagan! What do you want?"

"Good old Hank. Like to of scared the daylights out o' you, didn't I?" Hez let out a cautious rich laugh as he tossed the horse's bridle and slapped Hank on the thigh.

"What do you want?" Henry saw nothing funny; his heart was still racing with the fear he had known. Hez Eagan always had been as aggravating as a piece of tough meat wedged between your jaw teeth.

"I want to talk to you, and it ain't the kind of talk I'd come up and knock on your door to do—not with that sister Mariar and her brats with ears like jackasses."

"How'd you know it was me?"

"Knowed your hoss, and I seen you packin' them saddlebags out from the back kitchen. I knowed your pa wasn't goin' nowheres, so come down here to wait. I got a lot to say, so maybe you'd better get off and come down to my level. My hoss is tied off in the bresh."

Henry feared some trick. "I'm in a hurry, Hez."

"You're not hurryin' to get to St Jo to sign up for the army, air ye? Not after refusin' to join up for Delia?"

"No."

"Or to sign up with that bunch of prospectors goin' to the West for gold?"

"No."

"Well, what the hell is your hurry, now Delia's married?"

Henry would sooner have met anyone in the community than Hez Eagan. He'd talk all over the county.

"I'm goin' over to take Jim's folks some cured bacon."

"And I suppose that blanket tied on behind is for them, too. It's mighty hot weather in July to be needin' kivvers that heavy. Come on, Hank, I got a plan. Don't think I ain't knowin' why you didn't marry Delia Brookin'. And I'd have to be an even bigger fool than you are if I didn't know you was headin' for Canada as straight as I'm headin' for gold diggin'. I knowed you was aimin' to get out of this goldarned state where a man ain't wearin' pants 'less he's off chasin' Federals or Seceches."

"What's to keep you from fightin' if you go to California? You're still in the Union."

"Do you think anybody's comin' across a thousand or two miles of desert and mountain to get me to sign up? And besides there's gold out there. I ain't lost nothin' on either side worth riskin' my bones for, and you're just like me."

Henry closed his eyes. The stars and the lightning bugs were the only light in the deep of the night, but he could not even bear the chance of Hez seeing what was in his mind, the shame and disgust that all the rest of his life men like Hez would say, "You're just like me" . . . every draft dodger, every yellow-bellied coward . . . and that was what they were going to think he was.

Hez was an orphan, and didn't have brothers on both sides, or a pa to urge him on, or years of believin' by a ma. You shouldn't expect so much of Hez. . . . Henry knew there was no use to argue.

"I'm takin' my fiddle and my gun and the Widder's nag. I'll send pay to her for it when I make my first strike. She's got her crop all in, and she'll be better off walkin'. Bush-whackers might take this hoss, anyhow. You cain't go West without a hoss. If I don't find gold I can always play for dances. They say a good fiddler can name his price in California."

"I'd better be movin' on," Henry said. He wished he could feel as lighthearted about his leave-taking.

"Wait a spell, Hank, till I get the Widder's nag and I'll ride a piece with you."

Their horses went through the snortings of recognition and carried their riders off down the road.

"There's another reason, Hank, I'd like you should go along of me. They say there's plenty of robbin' and killin', and even though you air runnin' out on the war, I know you

ain't what they might call a coward. I'd like to have you for my friend on this trip, and besides I'd always feel sure you wouldn't kill me and take my gold, because you don't believe in killin', or so Delia Brookin' Hubbard says."

Hez was trying to sound funny, but Henry thought he was nearer saying what he thought than any other time.

"I guess it's just about as dangerous to go dig gold as to fight," Hez continued, "but they's always a chance you'll come back rich from out West, and from war it's more a chance you come home with one eye or one leg missin'."

"Yes." Hank didn't have words to say what he was thinking.

"It would be mighty comfortin' to know they was somebody that had knowed you for a spell and that you could trust."

"It sure would, Hez." All at once Henry felt more sorry for Hez on his "borrowed" nag than for himself.

"How much money you got?"

"Not much." Henry wondered if Hez had ideas of "borrowing" his money to go along with the Widder's nag.

"I got near fifty dollars. Been savin' it to buy a horse, thinkin' this war would be over and I could go courtin' me a girl with some money in her own right. I guess that'll see me through to a diggin'."

"You'd better take back the Widder's hoss and plan to go in a wagon for what work you can do on the trip."

"Hell no. Be afoot on them prairies with Indians whoopin' up the bresh and nothin' but a wagon as slow as Christmas to get away in? No, thanks. I've a mind I can trade the Widder's nag for a better one around St Jo."

"Now, it might be you could, but they still hang hoss thieves in Missouri."

"Not unless they ketch 'em."

Hank knew just how Hez's fine white teeth gleamed when he said that.

"And by daylight I'm goin' to be in Kansas. The Widder's not goin' to miss this hoss till day after tomorrow, 'cause she loaned her to me to go play down Prairie Ridge way. The Widder ain't been none too damn good to me anyhow these last eight years—she kinda owes me a hoss—all the sowbelly and beans I've et at her table."

Hank had a sudden notion that he would like to knock Hez off his horse for that. He remembered that Pa always said Hez didn't have anything like gratitude in his bones.

"She'll probably miss the hoss more than me 'cause I been away workin' and fiddlin' for play parties. I allus give her a dollar for Christmas and birthdays whether I'm flushed or not. I aim to buy her a silk dress when I come back."

Hank knew he despised Hez, but there was something comforting about his confidence, and two horses on a road always lessened the chance of bushwhackers.

About an hour after day, they rode into St Jo. They had made the trip in seven hours without hurting the horses, so Hez said, but Henry knew Sorghum was pretty well tuckered out. At the bridge across the Missouri they parted, Hez still begging Henry to go out West with him; but Henry by now had decided that California would be worse than going to war. It would be like going to a party on Sunday night when you had stayed away from church in the morning to rest the horses.

"See you when the war's over," Hez shouted back. He

sat his horse as proud as any Hubbard that had been practically born on one, and his curly black hair blew over his forehead in a way that any woman would like, Henry told himself. Hez would do well in California.

But Henry was not yet quit of Hez, for that afternoon as he walked Sorghum north out of St Joseph, he heard the rapid padding of a horse behind him.

"Hank! Oh, Hank!"

Never in Henry's life had he thought he would be glad to hear Hez Eagan's voice, but now he turned with actual joy in his heart. This day in St Joseph, idling about the streets while Sorghum rested with a feed bag on his nose, Henry tasted his first loneliness. There were people everywhere, strange tongues, strange faces, and a hurry of loading the river boats going south or west that made Henry want to shrink back into a corner for quiet, and yet the pressing crowd had no concern for him. They did not know that he was the youngest Brown boy, and his word was as good as his bond, like all the Browns'; that he could throw a knife farther than any boy on Crooked River, and that his sister Relly had married a Hubbard. To them he was just an awkward six-foot boy, in homespun clothes, in need of a shave, who might spend a dollar at their stores or lay five on their gambling table. It had sickened Henry. But here was Hez.

He drew alongside. "I ain't aimin' to ride the Widder's nag all the way," Hez told Hank calmly. "I've heard of a boat leavin' from Sioux City, Ioway. We can go near straight north from here, sell our hosses and buy our way on a boat that goes straight to the Missouri falls."

"Where's that?"

"Out in Washington Territory, where the Bitter Root River is, and the gold I'm aimin' to fetch."

From their tone of voice one might have thought they had planned this meeting. Henry forgot his suspicions of Hez in his relief for companionship.

"Where you plan to put up for the night?" Hez broke into his explanation.

"Somewhere soon. Sorghum needs grass and rest. I figure I won't have money to buy oats clear to Canada, and grass is good."

"If we'd stop before daylight's gone, I figure I could show you this paper I bought and we might make some plans. I learned a good game on that river boat, we might play awhile for stakes, just for the devil of it." Hez grinned at Henry. "I bought this bottle and a lug o' cheese as I come through St Jo. They say a real Swiss family that's come from the old country made it." Hez reached the "lug" over for Henry to smell after he'd patted the bottle of whisky back into place.

"I got side meat and bread of my own." Henry was once again cold. "How do you aim to stretch your fifty dollars to a stake in a gold field if you buy ever' first thing in sight?"

"Oh, but this is velvet. I won fifteen dollars from a country jay bird down on the levee."

"Now you aim to win my money too, so's you can force me to go West with you."

"Hank Brown, you're the damnedest suspicious fool I ever laid eyes on." Hez pulled up his horse and glared at Henry. "I'm runnin' the same risk ridin' with you that you're runnin' ridin' with me, and a damn sight more, 'cause

you can hit a man so's he's out for two or three hours, and I ain't got no protection 'cept this shootin' iron that's always gettin' plugged."

Hank chuckled—you couldn't stay mad at Hez.

"And besides I got a fiddle that's really worth stealin'."

So the two, who had never been friends if not exactly enemies, were suddenly grateful for each other's company in this strange venture.

They camped by a spring about ten miles out of St Jo, and Hez brought out his paper after they had hobbled the horses. The paper was a *Sioux City Register* published July 5, reporting the return of the *Emilie* from Great Falls on the Missouri. It was carrying gold that was worth nineteen dollars an ounce, and an editorial on the inside of the paper said there was no question about this being a real gold rush. It was no humbug!

In another part of the paper was an advertisement of other steamers. It was two thousand miles to Great Falls, and it would take around three weeks for the trip. You could go by stagecoach the remaining distance, two or three hundred miles.

"That's where I'm aimin' to go. I could pick up enough money makin' music on the way there to pay my stagecoach fare, and buy a grubstake to start minin'." Hez leaned back on his saddle and dragged out his pipe to light up.

Henry watched him jealously. He almost wished he had never had a family so he wouldn't be torn to pieces with wanting them. Now everything had its particular memory, even pipe smoke.

"But I still don't see how you're goin' to git out of goin' to war. You'll still be in U. S. territory."

"I'll worry about that. You could beat off anyone who might not fancy my tune and pass the hat," Hez went on with his own thought.

"If I was half my size I might—but not me."

They ate the bread and cheese and drank a good dose out of the bottle. "Come on, now, let me teach you this new game."

But the drag of whisky had made Henry sleepy and at the same time argumentative. Hez's efforts to teach him the game were more like trying to teach a young bear a new trick. Henry did take his leather money pouch out of his boot.

"Nice moneybag you got there. Look mighty purty filled with nuggets," Hez said. He was still as sober as Sunday. Hank grinned and laid a silver dollar down for stake, but when Hez won it, Henry cuffed him over and took it away from him.

"Damn your hide, you lunkhead, I won that fair. It's the game."

But Henry chuckled and laid down the dollar again with a waggle of his finger at Hez. Hez did not know that this was Henry's first real experience with hard liquor. There had been apple cider, gone a little hard, and grape and blackberry wine, but never straight whisky.

"If I win, it's mine!"

"No—no, it's mine." And at last Hez gave up and told Henry what he thought of him, which did not matter to Henry.

Henry kept on his boots, for that big left boot was where he carried his money.

In the middle of the night Henry was awakened by a yelling that nearly deafened his ears.

"Stop kickin' me, you jackass, stop—help!"

Henry was never to know whether Hez was actually trying to get at the money by pulling off his boot, for Henry was dreaming that Hez was after the money.

When Henry was fully awake, and Hez had subsided into moaning over his middle, Henry looked out to find the horses. There was only one shadow in sight.

"Where's the other hoss?" Henry was on his feet at once.

"Oh, go to sleep. They was fightin' there, so I took Sorghum on the other side of the crick, and I was just tryin' to ease you out of them heavy boots, you was kickin' around so doggoned uncomfortable."

Hank whistled to Sorghum. Hez slapped his hand over Henry's mouth.

"Shut yor mouth, you fool. Do you want ever' guerrilla in ten miles to know we're down here?"

"You're one to talk—yellin' fit to raise the dead."

"I'll go get your precious hoss."

"Oh no, you won't, Hez Eagan, I'll get him myself." Henry's head felt like a rain barrel on his shoulders.

But Hez was running on ahead in the darkness. Henry could hear him splashing through the water. He whistled to Sorghum again and this time was answered by a low whinny.

"Hez Eagan, if you've got some trick up your sleeve to get my hoss and leave me with the Widder's stolen nag, I'll break ever' damn bone in your body."

"Keep your shirt on, Hank. He'd broke his hobble, so I had to tie him up."

Hank stopped in his angry plunge through the darkness to get his bearings. Sorghum whinnied again, and Hank repeated his whistle. He was glad now of the months he had taken Sorghum to the hazel brush to hide him from the bushwhackers, for Sorghum knew to answer. Today the Widder would know her horse was stolen, and after all the boys weren't over forty miles from Crooked River.

Hez came out from among the trees leading Sorghum. Just on a suspicion, Hank ran his hand over the horse's back. Did he imagine it, or was Sorghum's back slightly moist where a saddle had been?

"I guess it's time we're goin' anyhow, Hez. Maybe safer."

It took five days of riding and hiding to reach Sioux City. Sorghum had grown tough under the saddle, and Henry had learned to beat Hez at his own game of cards. He was also shaving every other day with Hez's razor.

The sun was about an hour from setting as they looked into the face of it and saw Sioux City. It was sprawled up and out over the hills like a lazy boy with his feet dangling in the water. The Missourians pulled up their horses.

"Damn, that's a sight!" Hez ejaculated.

"It shore is."

The river widened into a flat basin that glowed like Ma's brass kittle after she'd scoured it in ashes. "Looks near about as big as it did in St Jo."

"*And* busier," Hez boasted. "Look, Hank, ain't them Indian canoes out there to the north?" Hank squinted at the specks that glided about like water skaters.

"They shore are." Henry's voice was awed. He was ready at the moment to think with Hez's optimism that

Sioux City was the finest place he had ever seen. "Indians!"

Henry had scarcely seen Indians before. He was so fascinated by the way they propelled their crafts down the river that he failed to see the smoke of the approaching steamboat. It was again Hez who made the discovery.

"Be damned if that ain't a boat comin' *down* the river, Hank. That would be the upper Missouri and more'n likely the Bitter Root mines."

Hank tore his hat from his head and let out a shout that would have sent the Indians for their weapons if they had heard it, and probably the soldiers, encamped on one of the hills, to their artillery. A Secech yell!

At once they sped their horses towards the landing. A dust rose up behind them and followed them into the town. They had no eyes for the houses, for they were racing to the big smoke of the steamer. They did become conscious of the crowd that joined them in their hurry. It looked as if the whole population were turning out to welcome the boat. The boys had to slow their horses to keep from trampling children and old people who ran into the streets.

"Hell, we're goin' to have to tie up our hosses and go afoot the balance of the way." Hez headed toward the first hitch rack.

"You go on. I'll watch your hoss." Henry's disappointment was only less than his concern for Sorghum.

"They don't need no watchin'! Who you suppose's watchin' all them tied there?"

Hank didn't say that he thought there wasn't a piece of horseflesh at that rack worth watching. Besides there were Indians around, and he'd heard they'd steal the very saddle out from under a man if they had a chance. Yes, sir,

this place was big, and there was a mighty press of people.

So Henry took the reins to the Widder's nag and followed on behind. He had time to hear the comments of the crowd: "From the mines"—"My Eddie'll be on there"—"Gold boat." The boy became so infected with the rush and excitement that Hez wasn't well out of sight before Hank was looking for a barn that hired stalls.

Just as Henry had located one that looked good enough for Sorghum, Hez came puffing up, his hat in his hand.

"My fiddle!"

Henry got off of Sorghum and helped Hez get the case unfastened from the back of the saddle on the Widder's nag.

"They'll be money comin' off that boat and be damned if I don't git some of it."

By the time Henry reached the river, the boat had docked and the passengers were just ready to come off. Hez was fiddling for all he was worth, and men and boys were shouting in rhythm while they waved and stomped.

"Any gold? Any gold?" one old man kept shouting from a toothless mouth ambushed in gray whiskers.

Women were holding children up to see, and girls were giggling and pushing each other for front places. A silence fell upon the crowd as the first passenger stepped on the gangplank, but Hez did not pause; the tune of his fiddle was gay and clear, and people looked towards him with tolerant smiles.

"Hurrah for the welcome!" the first passenger shouted and took a leather pouch out of his pocket. He was a dandy of a man who looked less like a miner than anybody Henry could imagine. He wore a silk hat, a silk tie and dark store coat. Below the waist he looked more like the West that

Henry had pictured—a great gun on his hip, pants that looked like cream-colored leather, and boots that came almost to his knees. But anybody could tell that the knobby pouch he was opening was not full of coins. He poured some of the pure-gold nuggets out into his palm—not a hard palm like Henry's from pulling leather and sickles, but one as smooth as a girl's.

"Hold out your hand, boy." The man with grandiose gestures took a crumb of a nugget from among the others and laid it in Hez's hand.

The crowd, which had stood in awed silence for the performance, raised a shout, more or less derisive, until the man repeated his gesture, this time with a nugget the size of a child's little fingernail.

"If it ain't Lefty Graves!" the toothless one said. "With them hands he ain't dug them nuggets." And he thrust his own weathered hand up into Henry's face. "See them? Them's callouses that you git from washin' gold. I know. I been to California and Oregon Territory, and I'll go back again when I can git away from my daughter, bedad if I don't."

Henry would have liked to listen to the old man, but he was too excited by the crowd coming off the boat. There were only three or four women at the most. He began to amuse himself by picking out the real miners by their hands. He could picture Hez coming back with a bag of gold and soft hands if somebody didn't shoot him for cheating at cards.

One man handed a woman a little bag of gold and told her her husband had gone farther into the mountains. She held the gold in her two hands and made no effort to stop

the tears that spread down her face. Henry had to look away, for it reminded him of the day Ma made soap when she'd heard her mother was dying.

Two army officers got off last. Suddenly Henry remembered why he was here. To look at this crowd you might easily forget there was a war in the country.

Hez clapped Henry on the back and brought him up to the moment.

"Hank, we sleep in a *hotel* tonight. Look at this!" He had a handful of gold crumbs and coins. "This boat is goin' back in six days, and I've already talked to the captain and he'll take me on as a musician. Hank, did you see them nuggets?"

The boys went into an eating house and ate a dozen eggs scrambled in butter the way Hez directed, a whole apple pie, and drank seven cups of coffee with cream. Hez paid the bill, after he got permission to play his fiddle for seventy per cent of the throw.

They got a room in a rooming house rather than a hotel, because prices were boosted to take care of the extra money in town, and neither boy was surprised at the fact that a single room was unheard of, that rooms were always rented with three double beds in them. Henry promised to get a job in the morning so that he could pay his share of the expenses without breaking into his capital.

At the river, boats from St Louis were shifting their load to smaller upper-river boats. If this had been St Louis instead of Sioux City, Henry might never had got a job at a dollar a day, for blacks would have done the work, but here a white man wasn't too proud to use his back. Part of the day Henry was helping to run a river ferry across the

Missouri. There were wagonloads of people, homesteaders, going to Nebraska and farther to take up land. Their great wagons and oxen made Henry wish he might go with them; that was the way Pa and Ma came to Missouri way back in the thirties.

At night, after loading barrels of flour all day, Henry was glad to have a bed to lie on instead of the hard earth of the prairie, though he knew that the prairie would be much cooler than this crowded room. Hez had played his fiddle in a music hall and collected ninety cents.

"Damn their stingy hides," Hez said as he put his money in a tobacco sack and stuck it in his boot, "maybe I'll have to load and unload their dirty grub after all. It's a good thing I could sell the Widder's nag."

The two were in the stuffy bedroom. Hank sat gloomily on the only chair. A coal-oil lamp with a reflector sputtered and stank. "I don't want to hang around here much longer. The enforced enrollment comes up soon and them recruitin' officers are goin' to make it tough. You cain't hardly git to the boat for women and men tryin' to argue a body into enlistin' so he'll get his hundred dollars bonus instead of having to be drafted. Ioway don't want no draft."

"Better come with me." Hez said it weakly, for Hank had been mad once too often for Hez to risk getting him riled.

"I read in a paper flour was sellin' for twenty-five dollars a barrel in Bitter Root, and it's only four dollars here. Wish I had a hundred barrels out there."

"There you go, money again." Hez stretched himself out on the bed with his boots on. "You'd ort to come with me. What'll you find in Canada?"

"Snow, probably."

"Got any idee where you're goin'?"

"No, just straight north till I hit Canada. I heard on the boat today that you couldn't get to Canada by boat now 'cause they'd pick you up. It'd cost too much anyhow to take Sorghum, and I ain't goin' to sell him so's he'll git in the army." Henry was unfolding a paper that he'd taken from his pocket. "Paid twenty-five cents to a man on the street for this."

Hez raised his head from the pillow. "War map! Hank, you're the dangedest crazy coot I ever seen. Run off to Canada to git away from the war, and take along a map of the army placement."

"Yeh." Hank spread it out on the washstand after he had set the rust-marked pitcher and bowl on the floor. He smoothed the folds until the map lay flat in multicolors. "Don't look much different from a crazy quilt."

He scanned the Missouri section. Thomp was somewhere south of the river, and Jim was probably somewhere near chasing him, if they hadn't already killed each other. Jerm Hubbard, Delia's husband, had gone to Mississippi, and Nate was off in South Carolina. Henry stared at the map. And it had all been one country where neighbors visited and had corn huskings and quilting bees, and went to church on Sundays and let the niggers sit on the back seats to listen, niggers who always rode behind like nigger Tapp.

Quickly Henry folded the map and stumbled out of the room.

"I guess I'll get a job loadin' another boat today," Henry told Hez the morning Hez was to take his leave. Henry was

afraid he would give up and go West to hunt gold if he once saw Hez on a boat grinning down at him. Hez did not argue.

"I bought you a new pipe, Hank, there's nothin' like terbaccer to keep a body warm in winter."

Henry turned the pipe in his hands. It was a nice pipe with a straight stem like Ma's. "Thanks, Hez."

Henry was even more touched than surprised at Hez's generosity. Why hadn't he thought to get something for Hez? And then he remembered his own leather money pouch that fitted in his boot. He seemed to remember once Hez saying something about it lookin' mighty purty full o' nuggets.

"I got somethin' for you too, Hez," Hank said shyly, and he took the money pouch out of his boot. "Joycie picked this out for me when her and Pa went to St Jo that time to see the cars. I ain't never had much use of it before."

Hez watched Hank empty the pouch.

"But what you goin' to do with your own cash?"

"Never mind, I'll make out."

"I'm obliged to you, Hank, and if I come back alive from out West, be damned if I don't bring you a nugget as pure as Christ Almighty himself."

Henry worked so hard loading the boat that he was too tired to remember Hez Eagan's laugh in the room that night, and the next day he took Sorghum from the stall he had hired and started north.

At the edge of town he was stopped by two men.

"Boy, where's your town?"

Hank was as badly scared as he had been the night Hez jumped from the bush at Sorghum's bridle.

"Missouri."

"There ain't no town Missouri."

"State."

"Deserter?"

"No, sir, I'm just comin' up eighteen."

"Must grow 'em big down there. He looks twenty to me, don't he to you?"

"Sure does."

"Where'd you get that horse, youngster?"

"Raised him, out of our own mare by Prince."

The men guffawed.

Henry thought at first he should give Sorghum a quick kick in the ribs and run for it, and then he saw that one man had his hand on his gun.

"You ain't by any chance headin' for Canada?"

Henry looked the man in the eye. "That's my business, stranger. If you'll step aside, me and my hoss'll be on our way." Henry couldn't imagine how he ever dared to be so bold. But that had always been the way; when he got enough scared he got as bold as Hez, even.

The two men looked at each other.

"How can you prove that's your horse?"

Hank whistled. Sorghum nickered softly. "You see, can you make him answer you?"

The two men looked at each other again, and then the man holding the gun motioned Henry to go on.

Henry ran Sorghum a mile before he dismounted and vomited his breakfast. He clung to the horse's sleek brown

neck, nausea and homesickness indivisible. "And this is only the starter."

Horseflesh was nearer human than any other beast, he told himself as the horse nuzzled his shoulder. All the days since he had left his home, he had not felt so lost, for Hez had always been there to break in, but now Hez was gone up the river, maybe to be scalped by Indians or killed for the very gold he would find. If the men had taken Sorghum, Hank knew he couldn't stand it. He'd simply go to the deepest place in the nearest river and jump in with his boots full of rocks.

He was as alone as Pap had been when he was twenty-two and got knocked off the timber barge going down the Ohio River. He had lain two days on the Kentucky bank near Greenup before anybody found him, one leg broken and nothing to sustain him but his pouch of tobacco that he had to dry on a rock before he could smoke it. Ma's little brothers had found him when they came down to fish. He was almost out of his head, but Ma, only sixteen, and her little brothers somehow got him up to the house.

Henry's lips began to curve in a smile, tender, for the little girl Ma must have been—and Pa with a brown beard. Henry felt his own chin—he'd probably let his own whiskers grow now that Hez was gone with his razor. He took out Hez's new pipe and filled it too full. He was a man. He'd act like one. But he had not finished the pipe before two riders overtook him and ordered him back to Sioux City.

He had seen the jail before. It was made of brick and looked stout enough to hold a mad bull.

On the inside it looked even stouter, for it was lined with solid oak logs a foot square. Henry knew now that he

should have gone with Hez. He knew it now that it was too late. That was always his trouble. He thought and thought about a thing and then decided wrong. Hez never stopped to think, he was just a good guesser. That's the way a feller ort to be.

"Have you tried to volunteer?"

"No."

"Where's your county? How old are you and why ain't you already in uniform?"

Henry's Missouri drawl with the nasal twang told the men more than his actual words.

"He's a Secech, I bet. Odd, him desertin'. I guess the Iowa boys made it too hard on you, did they?"

"No, sir."

"I don't see what you can do with him," a man in a good store suit said to the mayor as the two men led Henry away. "Try to draft and offer no means of enforcing it. That's just like Republican forethought. Woodbury County has filled her quota anyway. You can tell . . ."

But Henry heard no more after the thud of the heavy door as he was clapped into the cell. There were three others in there before him, so that he had no time to feel sorry for himself.

"What they got you in for?" The man who spoke had an odd scar on his forehead that extended back to make a bald patch the size of a cottonwood leaf on the top of his head. "They didn't find you with a good horse better than your station warranted, did they?"

Panic struck Henry.

"In Ioway they's harder on horse thieves than anything else, it always pays to carry your ownership papers."

Henry had never heard of such things.

"Probably desertion," a man with a silk necktie said. "Don't be afraid, they can't hold us. I shan't volunteer for their beastly war of commerce, either. As long as New England is making money out of the sale of arms and uniforms, this war will continue."

That was a shocking new thought to Henry.

The third prisoner, an utter giant of a man, was asleep on a bunk, his mouth open and sweat beading his forehead. It reminded Henry that the place was powerful hot and stinking.

"Don't mind him, he gets wild every time he gets drunk and has to lay over here to sleep it off. I'm warning you, though," said the man with the scarred head, "if he wakes, grab his leg, or he'll kick all three of us into kingdom come."

"I'd think that'd make him kick worse. It would me." Henry recalled the night he thought Hez was trying to take his money and Sorghum.

Silk-tie twisted his thin mouth into a contemptuous grin for Scar-head. "That's right, boy, don't believe everything you hear."

"I suppose you wouldn't believe me if I told you I was scalped by Indians when I was just your age."

Henry looked closer at the ragged scar on the man's head. The hair stood up around it like cat-tails around a swamp. "Yes, I would, if I ever thought anybody could live afterwards."

"See!" Scar-head gloated to Silk-tie.

"He's too wicked to die. But he can tell a good story. Let's have it."

So all morning Henry listened to the exploits of Scar-

head among the Indians. That scar gave him freedom among them because they thought he was a witch man to outlive a scalping.

Henry's hair rose on the back of his neck when the story got bloodiest.

Silk-tie sometimes put in at the most dramatic and exciting moments to ask what the white man had done to rouse the Indian.

"I've just come from up near New Ulm, Minnesota, and to look at those once-mighty Sioux at the point of starving to death, and penned into a section twenty by thirty miles when they've had hundreds of miles before! And the Indians there haven't been paid their annuity. Some paltry eighty-five thousand dollars, if you must know. Why? Because some crooked agent started trading in gold, then the price went up and now he's trying to pay big chief red man off in paper."

Henry felt that both of them were joshing him, but he couldn't help being stirred by what they said.

When they both had interrupted and argued until they were red in the face and drenched with sweat, Henry asked them shyly why the government let things like that happen.

"Do you know that this very minute there are more wronged Indians in the country than Negroes, but they just didn't have an old John Brown to go 'molderin' in his grave' for them. Here we're sending the flower of our youth to free the slaves that don't know enough to come in out of the rain without being told."

"Oh, I wouldn't say that. I think some niggers are smarter'n white men."

"That's an interruption, young feller," Scar-head said to

Henry. "Can't you see he's just leadin' up to say that there's not one man in the state with the guts to print the truth but Denis Mahoney?"

Henry looked from one to the other. He knew that they took him for a country fool, but they were saying so many things that bothered him. He'd never given the Indians a second thought before, and if what this man said was true they were in a fix!

"Who is this Denis Mahoney?" Henry wanted to know.

"I actually think you might understand," Silk-tie said with contempt for Scar-head. "It is because of people like him that men like Denis Mahoney have to fight alone."

"You damned copperhead, you!" The giant of a man on the bunk, whom Henry had forgotten, lunged out towards the silk-tied city man. He had him by the neck and was knotting the silk about his thin throat until Henry's eyes bulged in sympathy.

Scar-head retired at once to a safe corner as the giant leaped from the bunk, but Henry had stood speechless. Then suddenly Henry knew something had to be done or Silk-tie would be as dead as a fish on a platter. He knew there was no need to attack the huge fellow in the ordinary way. Maybe Scar-head had known some real reason why he would be especially roused if his leg were pulled. Consequently Henry eased around to the side and made a lunge for the man's boot. He pulled so hard that the giant's knees went out from under him and he fell with a grunt on Silk-tie.

Perhaps because he was taken by surprise, perhaps because his hands were thrown out of position, nobody knew, but Henry had broken the hold and given the fellow an-

other antagonist. Henry knew how to fight the woods way and went to it.

"Lord God Almighty," the big man panted, now as sober as Henry, and not half as intense, "I'll swallow you like the whale did Jonah before I'm through with you."

But Scar-head let out an Indian yell that brought the jailer before Henry ever found out whether he could hold his own with the big fellow. Henry's lip was bleeding, and his homespun shirt was torn clear across the back.

"I told you not to put Big Abe in here with us," Silk-tie was saying rather hoarsely. "If it hadn't been for the Missourian you'd have some explanation to make to the Iowa press in the form of Denis Mahoney for my murder. This is supposed to be a country where free speech is possible."

"Shut your gab," one of the officers said. "You'll find yourself in prison down in Washington with the other traitors."

They took Henry away to wash up his wounds.

"How'd you like to fight for pay?" one of the officers asked.

"I'm not enlistin'," Henry said stubbornly. "I'm on my way to visit my folks in Minnesota."

"Where at in Minnesota?"

Henry mentioned the name of the Minnesota town he had most recently heard: "New Ulm."

But not until he had been turned over to a female inquisitor, who for a moment was occupied in treating his split lip, did he realize that the officer meant to fight in the square at night for pay, no holds barred. He must have been pretty good. Henry was glad he'd been able to take the big fellow.

The woman had a black mole with three stiff hairs exactly in the middle of her chin. He forgot everything but the necessity to keep from laughing at her goat whiskers.

"Don't you want to join up with the Iowa Volunteers and be a pride to your country instead of skulking off somewhere heaven only knows?"

"No, ma'm." Henry tried to watch her hands instead of her chin.

"Don't you know you can't find a job? Why, they won't even let you off the boat, they'll clap you right into the army up in the North after you've had that hard trip up there."

"Yes, ma'm."

Henry looked at her. His eyes were as blue as Ma's, and they must have been enlarged by the tears of laughter he was holding back.

"Oh, you great big beautiful homesick boy! I'll bet you're just now eighteen!"

He was afraid she was going to bend over and kiss him. She was older than Ma, and he could almost feel those mole hairs prick. He blinked very hard. "Eighteen in July."

She brushed her hand across her eyes and then stiffened. "You're too handsome a chap to throw your days away in hiding. You don't want to be a pariah."

"No, ma'm." He'd never heard of one, but her tone of voice let him know what his answer should be.

"Don't you realize that someday you may want some nice girl to marry you? And what will you tell her you did during the war? Ran off and hid to keep from facing a battle line?"

• Henry, who had colored up like a girl with her first beau,

was too tongue-tied to explain, though he felt that this woman with the mole might come near understanding.

"Oh! It's no use! But don't you think you ought to free those poor black men in bondage?" She had stopped dabbing at Henry's lip with the wet cloth and sat back to look at him.

Henry wished she had heard the man with the silk tie talk about the poor Indians and about the New England states making so much money from the sale of guns and uniforms.

"Niggers don't want freein' as I can see."

"Oh, you're a Democrat!"

"No, I ain't. But I just know some slaves that are better off than a lot of whites."

"Who have you been talking to, young man? You couldn't possibly have got ideas like those by yourself."

"No, ma'm."

"What did those men in the cell talk about?"

"Oh, I don't know—Indians mostly, and a man named Denis Mahoney."

The woman gasped and rose so fast she almost upset the basin of water. "Just what I thought. I told Sam he'd better not put you in there with those men. Have you any idea who Denis Mahoney is?"

Henry shook his head.

"He's the editor of the most traitorous paper in this state, the Dubuque *Herald*. I use it only to light my fires. I don't see how Governor Kirkwood can know what he's about and let that man go free to spread his seditious writings. All Democrats aren't quite that bad—some of them even have joined up with the army. But Denis Mahoney!" She stopped

and looked at Henry so sharply that he wanted to dodge. "Young man, you're not a spy, are you? Now tell me the truth."

Henry maintained he was not.

"I've got a mind to have you searched."

"Oh, you don't need to." Henry stood up and started turning out his pockets. "I ain't a spy. I can't see why you don't believe me. Honest, I don't look like one, do I?"

Henry smiled so engagingly that she was almost convinced.

"Tricks! That's what it is. Sending a poor innocent-looking boy like you up here thinking you'd get around us by your very age."

She flounced from the room, her starched skirts rattling all the way down the hall.

Henry went to the door and looked after her. There were two men at the end of the hall or he might have made a run for it. Sorghum would be harder to get out.

One of the men came back.

"Peel 'em off."

"What?"

"Your clothes. We ain't lettin' no spies get by us."

The man even poked in Henry's mouth and combed through his heavy coppery hair. He took the map Henry had bought and held it up to the light and at last touched a match to it. He scraped the inside of the pipe Hez had given him and emptied the bag of tobacco on the table. At last, when he let Henry put his clothes on, he looked just too disappointed.

The woman came back. "Oh," she said a bit sadly as she watched Henry work with the picture of Ma and Joycie.

The little picture of Ma and Joycie was ripped from the folder. "I'm glad you aren't a spy."

Henry continued to struggle with the picture.

"Give it here."

"I guess I'm old butter fingers." Henry smiled again at her.

"Is this your mother?"

"Yes, ma'm."

"Any others in your family?" Henry told her of the others, and the ones in both armies.

She was plainly moved. "Well, that's that, and now I'll put some plaster over your lip." Henry had completely forgotten about his injury. "I'm carrying on for my cousin, the doctor who has gone to war, brave soul that he is."

Henry watched the hairs on her chin quiver, and had no least inclination to laugh. "He probably won't get shot. Doctors don't often get shot," Henry assured her.

"Oh, you are a good boy. And I know your perversity comes from ignorance rather than inability to perceive. Young man, can you read and write?"

"Yes, ma'm."

"We'll just see!" She left and was gone for five or ten minutes. "Here, prove that you can read. My father went on that expedition. I practically know those books by heart."

She gave Henry the volumes of *Long's Second Expedition*, a dissertation on the travels of a party sent out by President Monroe from Philadelphia to explore the St Peter's and Red rivers, and to go as far north as Lake Winnipeek in 1828.

As Henry started reading he knew the woman was his

friend after all, for the books told all about the country and Indians on this exploration. From the map and from what the woman had told him about getting picked up on the boats, Henry decided to head for the Red River and Lake Winnipeek and Fort Garry. He could get himself a buffalo. It was supposed to be very cold up there in winter, and Henry hated cold, so it wouldn't be like going for gold.

The next day but one, the sheriff decided to let Henry go. The woman with the mole had spent much time talking to him, and Henry felt it was due to her that he was allowed to take Sorghum. "They aren't sure that horse is yours," the woman said, "but I am. You told me you raised him from a colt, and I believe you. But with your eyes and hair, *any* woman would believe *anything* you said." She laughed at Henry. "Be a good boy. I put a fresh coffee cake in your saddlebag. You will find it difficult to go in and out of towns, for we feel sure Secretary Stanton will send out an order empowering states to detain draft dodgers, but so far we do not. Probably at Dubuque and Des Moines, where they have the telegraph, they already have the orders."

It was then August 11.

It was not until August 14 that Henry read in an Iowa store the "IMPORTANT ORDER BY THE WAR DEPARTMENT, August 8, 1862." It gave the officers in the town power to pick up and hold any possible draft evader, and rewarded the officer five dollars for each one. Out of the draft dodger's pay would be taken the five dollars and all expenses for getting to the nearest camp for services.

Henry was mighty glad he wasn't in Sioux City after they

finally got the order, or he would be in an Iowa army camp. He might better have joined up in Missouri, for then Pa would have been happy and Ma could have thought of him with pride.

IV

HENRY'S PROVISIONS WERE LOW, but since reading that war order he was afraid to go into the towns for more. He really hadn't wanted to steal the man's watermelons, but he was so sick of birds and rabbits, cooked over his fire at night so his smoke wouldn't be seen by Indians or officers, that he couldn't resist the temptation.

The patch was in a secluded spot along the bank of the Floyd River. Henry spotted it a mile ahead and saw no house close enough to bother about. He guided Sorghum down into the bed of the river, which was not even a good-sized creek up here in Minnesota so near its source.

The folks at home were probably tired of watermelons, Henry thought, but up here the things were just beginning to ripen; that showed more than anything else how far north he had come. He tied Sorghum to a sapling and stole ahead. He wouldn't dare eat the melon here in the patch. But what if it weren't good after he'd carried it away?

The patch was at least a half-acre, so the planter had enough to spare a couple. Hank thumped six before he felt

assured and picked one. Good thing Sorghum was such a gentle horse, he'd be guided by his rider's knees. Hank simply couldn't wait; he thumped one of the melons on the ground and burst it open to eat out the heart. It was sun-hot and almost too ripe, but Henry had never in his life tasted anything so good. He didn't even wait to use his knife, but gouged out the center with his fingers and wolfed it down. Sugar-sweet and melting to nothing, once in his mouth it was so good he couldn't believe it.

There was an extra-large one in the center of the patch that he wanted to take, but he'd helped Pap grow melons, and he remembered how they always saved the biggest for seed, so Henry passed to smaller growth.

He was laughing now as he got back to Sorghum with two melons. It was almost impossible to mount, but at last he thought of putting the smaller melon into his grub sack. Once on Sorghum he rode for open country. He'd ride at least an hour before he'd let himself stop to eat. The melon got heavy under his arm, so he changed to the other. At last he saw a clump of trees in good grassland about a quarter of a mile ahead and made for the spot. He wanted to let out a whoop of joy when he got off Sorghum and had his treasure safe in a shady spot. It was a mighty pity he didn't have time to lay one of the melons in a spring to cool it off.

He turned Sorghum to grass and got out his knife. He would cut this one and eat every bit but the seeds and rind. If he was home Ma might even save the rinds for preserves and the seeds for next year, unless she let the kids spit the seeds for fun to see how good was their aim.

He scoured his clasp knife on his sleeve, for he'd used it in dressing game, and plunged it in up to the horn handle.

There was a delicious cracking and splitting. He closed his eyes to breathe in the mouth-watering fragrance that rose to his nostrils. There was a second cracking, and Henry opened his eyes, only to close them again and blink twice.

There were two knives sticking in that melon.

It was as if somebody had slipped a wet strap down Henry's spine. The handle of the other knife was almost half again as long as Henry's, and it twanged there in the melon after Henry's was still.

"God Almighty." Henry couldn't take his eyes from that other handle. It was bone and painted red and brown.

Henry's hand went slowly, automatically to his scalp lock, and then as automatically back to the strange knife. He had always been able to throw knives—it was sometimes safer than trying to get at guns. If he was surrounded by Indians, there was nothing he could do but defend himself in close combat. For this moment he could pretend it was his own knife.

He cut through the melon with the two knives. His own was in his right hand, for he was sure of its weight. It would turn once at fourteen feet; at that clump of trees yonder it would turn twice. Henry stood up. He heard a voice behind him, words that he could not understand, but he could comprehend their meaning when he felt something prod him under his left shoulder blade.

He sank back to the ground.

Henry searched the trees around him for more faces or forms.

This must be some of their kind of torture, suspense and uncertainty. Maybe the knife was poisoned. The watermelon was at his feet. Scar-head had said something about

bluffing an Indian and that he was like a child. Henry sat down on his heels, the quicker to gain his stance if need be. He dug out a big chunk of melon with his own knife, far to the side of where the other knife had penetrated. If he was going to die he might as well die full, as Pap used to say.

His throat was so tight he could scarcely swallow the first bite, but by the third, his natural hunger had returned and he was swallowing with something like ease. He kept his eyes on the melon by force of will, and though the wet strap up his spine was no less chilling he made a good picture of a boy enjoying a watermelon. When he came to the seeds he treasured them in his mouth and shot them from him like buckshot at the trunks of the nearest trees. With the next mouthful he spat them towards the overhanging branches until the leaves rattled and shook as if with hail. This had always made Joycie and the boys laugh. Then at last, when he was almost to the end of the first half, he threw the Indian's knife from him and used it as a target for spitting the seeds.

He was beginning to wonder just how long he could keep this up—there were really three more halves—when he felt a hand on his shoulder. So far, he had tried to ignore the voice, except to obey it, but this hand was in plain sight—long copper fingers, broken-nailed and dirty, but heavy as Pa's when he was riled.

“Ump!”

Henry couldn't bear to turn his head. He lifted the cut half of the melon; if there wasn't an army of them behind him he might blind one of them by smashing it into his face and have his knife free for defense.

"Ea." The copper hand took the half-melon, and Henry swung up to stand facing an Indian.

He was no larger than Henry, and looked even younger. The red man turned and sped softly for his knife. His back was towards Henry, and for one wild moment the boy longed to raise his own knife and throw it into the middle of that glistening brown back because of the terror he had known; but he was held back by the uncertainty that was still eating at his judgment.

Then his arm hung limp at his side, and he was shaken by his own cowardice. To strike even an Indian in the back! He might better have gone to join with Price or Halleck. He sank to the ground from the weakness of his own flesh. If there were more Indians they could take him; he was powerless to defend himself now. The knife slid from his fingers.

The Indian came back and sat cross-legged beside Henry and started eating the watermelon. Suddenly Henry realized that the fellow was chuckling. He motioned for Henry to take the shell of the melon out in front. Henry's back was cold in the spot opposite his heart. He could almost feel the red-handled knife going in between his ribs, but he made his legs carry him steadily. When the Indian shouted something to him, Henry stopped and turned around. He'd probably face a dozen arrows with his breast—anything rather than this suspense. But the Indian was laughing.

He motioned Henry to put down the melon rind and come back. Henry obeyed. The Indian patted the ground beside him and pointed to the other melon.

At last Henry got the idea that they were to spit the seeds into the empty shell. Each time Henry missed, the

Indian made a notch in Henry's melon and did the same for himself. At first Henry missed almost two out of five, but when he began to get more steady he could beat the Indian with ease.

Hours later, when the moon made shadows on the path, Henry lay stiffly conscious of the red man beside him. The mosquitoes had come in swarms, and even a smudge of damp moss that stank to heaven did no good. At last the Indian had crawled in under the blanket with Henry. There they lay, one sleeping with the utter abandon of a child while the other lay awake, suspicious of a trick.

Henry remembered the night Hez took Sorghum across the creek. This Indian's pony would surely be no swap, even if the fellow didn't take his scalp to tie to Sorghum's bridle as a fly scare. Sometimes Henry shivered with his own imaginings; again he felt the hysteria of laughter shake his middle. That melon game . . . and the fellow giggling like a boy at him! No wonder people couldn't trust Indians. Now and then he assured himself he was as safe as he had been back home in bed with Thomp or Jim. The fellow had offered to ride with him for two more suns. Maybe it was a trick to get him to the Indian camp, to burn him at the stake or torture him to death.

Maybe if he'd give the fellow a present he'd take himself off. Henry by now had learned to like his pipe, in fact to crave it. He really didn't want to part with it, even though the Indian had borrowed it and grinned as he clenched it between his white teeth. It would be out of the question to give up his gun or his knife. A silver dollar! That was it! But the offer of a silver dollar simply sent the Indian into a dance of joy and furor of sign talk that Henry

couldn't understand. He at last resigned himself to the companionship.

He did not know until the end of the second day that he was in no danger from the Indian because the red man had smoked with him that first night. He had smoked a pipeful of Henry's tobacco, and this had shown that he was bound for another day to keep the peace. But by then Henry had actually begun to enjoy his strange partner.

Their conversations were limited, but their games, when they stopped to rest their horses, were more fun than Henry had known since he had left Missouri or even since he was a little boy and had played at school. They stopped to swim in every fine stream or lake that was more convenient for the Indian than for Henry. There were certain advantages to being uncivilized. They threw knives at tossed-up clods, they jumped ditches, they threw stones at muskrats (for now they were in the lake district of Minnesota), they blew feathers in races, with their hands they caught fish and without taking off their scales roasted them under the ashes. At first Henry had entered into the game as he had blown the watermelon seeds, to bluff the Indian, but before he realized it he was playing because he was young and couldn't help it.

The matter of names was hard. The Indian had difficulty with the *h* in "Henry," and Henry was simply powerless before the Indian's "Onjewanhee" until the Indian explained by taking one arrow and shooting it at a tree—One Arrow. The Indian decided to call Henry Missouri.

Henry realized that he wasn't covering as much ground as he should each day, with six or seven hundred miles be-

tween him and Fort Garry, but he consoled himself with the idea that Sorghum was getting a good rest.

On the third day Onjewonhee led Henry into the camp of his people. By now Henry's fear had gone—but it returned when he was surrounded by this chattering, naked mob. Onjewonhee acted as proud as a Missouri bear hunter over his kill, and for a time Henry wondered if he weren't going to fare like the Missourian's catch.

The Indians pulled at his clothes, stuck curious fingers into his pockets, handled his knife and at the last made poor Sorghum so nervous that Henry was afraid one of the Indians might get kicked or bitten and thus bring down the wrath of the tribe on his rider. Henry finally made them understand that he needed to put his horse in the shade, but this only led to further efforts to get hairs from Sorghum's great cascade of foam-colored tail. However, after one or two of them got rather severely kicked, the red men came back to examine Henry.

They laid hands on his light hair, and one even stroked his upper lip where the reddish fuzz showed. All the while Onjewonhee danced about and registered pride.

Fortunately there was one of the Indians who could manage English fairly well, and he explained why One Arrow was off by himself. He had been sent in search of a white man who would go to the agency and collect the proper annuity. Henry even had some of the silver in his pockets, so of course he was one of the White Father's sons. The old chief could not go on his annual buffalo hunt because he lacked money for supplies. What would they do when winter came and they had no new robes or jerked meat to keep the cold from surrounding their bones?

It took many hours around the fire, many pipes of tobacco (Henry's was soon gone, and he didn't like their kinnikinnick, but he had to smoke) to hear the entire story. Time and again Henry had to rub his eyes to keep them from closing, what with the smoke and the low chant of the interpreter who sat between him and the big chief.

The White Father had promised the chief money in silver and gold for all his wives and children, and when he went to the agency the white man would give him only paper. To be sure, it was green paper like leaves on the willows in spring, but it would burn, and nothing was left that you could touch. It would go like sparks in the wind, and the man at the trading post would sell him nothing without money.

Henry roused himself enough to take out one of his silver dollars. He talked for an hour, trying to explain. He showed his knife that had been bought for three of the paper dollars. Henry begged them to let him sleep and said he would go with them to explain to the agents that the Indian would take his annuity in paper, so he could buy supplies for hunting the buffalo along the Red River four suns distant.

At last Henry was permitted to sleep, only to be aroused at daybreak by a whoop that stood his hair on end. "Missouri, Missouri——" It was One Arrow shaking the sleep off of Henry. He must ride to the agency with the ten red tribe leaders and the chief. Onjewonhee was permitted to ride with the leaders because he had found the mighty white man.

They made quite a procession. Sorghum, by far the handsomest horse, seemed to sense something of the dignity of the occasion and arched his neck and tail for parade. In

spite of the heat the chief wore his best blanket, to distinguish him from the other warriors. Henry assured the chief that he, Henry, must not go into the agency with them because the agency was built only for the agent and the Indians. He did not feel it wise to explain that he feared the presence of an officer who would arrest him for the five-dollar bounty.

He explained to Onjewonhee that they must ride as fast as they possibly could towards the lodges if white men came near and drew guns. They might want to take Sorghum away from him to send him to the White Father's war.

Luckily the white men who came near were not officers. They did comment on Sorghum, but only in reasonable ways, mentioning his mane and tail. Henry did not even have to pay close attention.

The chief was much longer at the agency than Henry had expected. The interpreter later explained to Henry that the agent refused to pay at first, and then after a lot of argument said he'd give them absolutely *all* he could spare. The White Father would see that they got fully paid soon. "No good medicine."

They rode back to the Indian camp with their money and partook of a feast of dog meat that the squaws had been preparing. Henry knew he had to eat of the feast, but it was with a weak stomach that he at last joined the group to count the money.

Henry later wished he hadn't been good at figures, but right now he rolled up his sleeves and counted the green-backs. He could hear the Indians talking; the interpreter chattered constantly to keep Henry informed so that he would not be offended. None of the other Indians had taken

paper money because they did not have a "Missouri" to tell them it was good.

When Henry came to the end of the pile, he asked for the rest. But there was no more.

"There has been some mistake. Are you sure this is all that you got?"

They were sure.

Henry looked again at the signed statement that the agent had given them. They had exactly one tenth as much money as they were supposed to have.

For a moment Henry recalled Silk-tie and his talk of the Indians. Of course he couldn't have been right. The agent had just made a mistake . . . he had given them one-dollar bills instead of ten. What trouble had he got these poor Indians into?

He tried to explain that the White Father's agent had made an accidental mistake, as the big chief sometimes stumbles over his dog. But that wasn't so fortunate, because they had just had a dog feast. At last Henry convinced them that they *must* return at once to the agency or the agent would think they had spent the money.

It was a sad, angry party that returned with Henry. He would have to risk the agency himself, for he could not trust the Indian interpreter to make himself understood.

Henry went in surrounded by his friends, but once inside he realized only one Indian was permitted in the room at a time, so he took the big chief. As long as Henry lived he was to remember the next fifteen minutes among his most unpleasant ones. He was glad that he had taken the chief instead of the interpreter, because he had to tell so many lies to get a hearing.

"But you'd ought to want to make your mistakes right. It ain't like you was dealin' with men that know as much as you do," Henry begged.

"There is no mistake—you can read for yourself, here on my books—it says five hundred dollars was paid to the chief—and that is out of order. None of the Indians have been paid this year. Just enough for rations to keep them from going on the warpath. Read! If you can!"

Henry read, and at last realized he might as well be arguing with the law.

"If the Indians swarm down on you and kill off some whites, you'll chase them like savages and kill them. You'll put the blame on them." Henry's face was red with fury. "You're crookeder'n a dog's hind leg, and I bet Denis Mahoney'd like to hear about this." Henry used the name he had heard.

"Who's he?"

Henry ignored the question. "This tribe will take this complaint to the President—he at least ain't a thief!"

"You have no proof! The proof lays here in my books. And if I was a deserter like you I'd not hang around *too* long, there might just be some officers from Fort Ridgely in soon."

Henry knew when he was licked. But he wanted to tear that agent apart. The chief, who had stood quietly beside Henry during the whole argument, looked at Henry to know what he should do. Henry picked up the short payment and walked out. He couldn't help the Indians. He had probably brought on more evil than good fortune.

Henry came back to Onjewonhee and the others and told them they must ride away from the settlement to talk.

The interpreter was already questioning Henry. If he had only kept his mouth shut about the business of the Indians being cheated they might never have known, but here he might be the cause of starting them on the warpath. Maybe he should go out and offer himself as a target. It was all another case of "hit" and "it" and the bandy-legged traveler who wasn't a horse thief.

The Indians were inclined to be resentful towards Henry, until the chief assured them that Henry had been able to get no more money from the agent. They decided to go into town and buy hunting equipment for the buffalo hunt and see how far the money would go. Fifty dollars could buy considerable lead and gunpowder, Henry knew that much about prices.

"But they owe hundreds more than this. It's on my books," the storekeeper, who acted scared, argued. "They've been getting credit for six months—this should really go on account."

Henry, who knew so little about a buffalo hunt, said, "But if that's the case you'd ort to be glad to get them out of your way for a while, till they get their whole annuity! This powder will kill a lot of buffalo, and don't you try to overcharge them, either. Why, just think of the robes you can collect!"

"Four dollars a stack! Bah!"

"Here, Missouri!" The interpreter was asking Henry's advice. The storekeeper turned to stare at Henry.

"Missouri, eh? Too many of your kind around here for the good of these Indians. I'd advise you to get out!"

But Henry paid no attention as long as he had these

braves behind him. Some of the warriors suggested fire-water, but the storekeeper looked at Henry and refused.

The squaws were overjoyed with the news of a buffalo hunt. The whole Sioux nation would eventually go along, but this tribe would go ahead and locate the game. The women started bringing out buffalo bags to pack their traps. They intended to start by sun-up tomorrow. The children rolled and danced and played buffalo hunt underfoot, while the braves worked on their hunting equipment, knives and arrow tips, spears from their leather sheaths, and guns.

There was to be no supper in the lodges that evening; everyone was too busy.

And then the real disturbance came.

Henry was cleaning his own gun at the time. He was tearing squares of domestic to soak in some hot grease that a squaw had given him in a mussel shell. With a sense of utter security he was melting lead for his bullets over a fire, though he was smarting from a sense of injustice when he let his mind go back to the agent. The Indians were his friends; he trusted them.

Within a minute the entire picture changed. A Sioux scout on a spotted pony dashed into the midst of them. He pushed aside those who surrounded him the instant he was on the ground and strode towards the chief's lodge. The warriors who had been polishing their lances carried them along as they followed the scout; the children stopped their play to stare; the women dropped their packing to catch up their babies and to follow with their eyes the men who pushed ahead.

Henry tried to keep on with his bullet molding, but he spilled the hot lead on his boot and left a scar. He realized

that the sun had set and darkness was coming on. A silence settled over the camp like a swarm of locusts, until the scout came out of the chief's lodge to start a buzzing. The talk flowed in waves as the warriors strode beside him. The women picked it up. Henry wished he had learned a few words of their language, for it was always the same sentence that went from mouth to mouth.

It made the Indians look towards Henry with a new expression. Could it be that they knew about his running away from war? Was it army officers sending for him? Had the agent reported him at Fort Ridgely? What wouldn't the Indians do to him if they knew? He felt a cold sweat on his forehead, and his hands were as weak as if made of tallow. The bullet mold dropped and sprang open, so that the newly made bullet rolled into the fire at his feet and melted to a jagged lump.

The interpreter passed close, and Henry called to him, but after one look at the chief, who shook his head, the fellow walked away with no word for Henry.

Onjewonhee pointed to Henry and said something to the chief. It was a long speech. Henry would never know what it meant, but the chief nodded. The young Indian came to Henry and led him inside his lodge.

There was a clutter of buffalo bags that were half filled with food and cooking utensils; another lay beside a half-dozen turtle shells and splintered bones that Henry recognized as paintbrushes to be taken on the hunt for the pictures that should go on the wet hides.

Onjewonhee smiled at Henry and took one of the turtle shells. He looked long at Henry, then signed to him by making the motion of shooting arrows and running in pur-

suit until Henry got the idea of a big hunt. (Yes, probably hunting for him.) He offered Henry one of the shells filled with brown pigment. Henry shook his head. He'd never pass for an Indian, not with Ma's blue eyes.

He didn't want to paint himself.

Henry could hear the pounding of hoofs. He could hardly keep from running to the flap to see if they had taken Sorghum, but it would do him no good to know. His gun lay on the ground beside his saddle, where he had been making bullets.

The Indian boy shouted something, and as he left the tepee three old women came in to sit upon the floor in front of Henry. He looked at them crouching there, old and leather-faced, with veined hands as slim as claws—buzzards waiting for his carcass, he thought. He wondered if he should make a break for it. What would they do to him? What a coward they must think him if they sent three helpless old women as guards. Those same old women had served at the dog feast. They must be important to the chief.

Henry's mind spun dizzily.

The chief trusted him to have respect for the old—the chief held him in contempt—the chief wanted to dishonor him. Henry wanted to shout to them to tell him what was the matter, but he knew they could understand no words of his tongue. He stood up. The three old women made no move. He walked to the tent flap. In one voice, the three uttered a word of command. He turned back to face them. Back and forth he paced, while the three old women built a fire and lighted it with a live coal from the fire outside.

If he wanted he could drag out one of the tent poles and

pull the whole tepee down upon them and their clutter. He knew he was strong enough. The fire would make the old women forget him as they tried to save themselves. The three shadows of the old women rose and fell with the fire, and his own shadow towered and distorted itself against the sides of the tepee—it looked even more violent than he felt, as it broke itself apart against the smoke hole and the slit in the tent.

The wind came down from the top, and the smoke choked him. He suddenly felt like screaming like a horse in a burning barn.

What if the warriors had taken Sorghum? He thought the worst. What could he do on foot in this land of lakes and trees and stretches of prairies? It would do no good to make a run for the bush, he had to have a horse. He had to have Sorghum!

It was quite dark now; he saw the evening star in a dark blue sky. This night might be the last time he would see a star. The gleam of the evening star swelled into many rays before his eyes. His people would not know what had become of him. Only Ma would know he was dead—a part of her heart. He watched the star until it returned to proper focus before he came back towards the three old women and the six turtle shells and four buffalo bags—no, there were only five turtle shells: the brown one was gone.

The women started talking, never laughing as they had during the dog feast, but droning on, solemn and heavy-toned. At last one old woman broke into a weird singing. Her voice was too old for music but not too old to convey to Henry the sad picture she was describing. He thought she must be singing of all the sorrows of her race.

The evening star had sunk, and the entire heavens seemed to have wheeled across the slit in the tent before Henry's painfully acute ears caught the sound of horses. The three old women got up and stood before him. He felt guilty looking upon their ugliness and grief.

Henry heard but one horse returning. He couldn't be sure what he wanted that to be—a warrior come to get him, a soldier from the Fort, anything, rather than this waiting.

Onjewonhee came up to the tent. In the light from the fire he looked like a new person. His eyes were huge with excitement, his nostrils were larger, his voice was quick and authoritative as he addressed the old women and made signs for Henry to pass. Henry followed him as best he could through the darkness, his boots clanking over hidden rocks that the moccasined feet ahead had crossed in silence.

"Onjewonhee."

The Indian stopped, and Henry bumped into his back in the dark. Instead of angrily rebuking him, as Henry expected, the Indian put back his hand to steady him.

What kind of people were these Indians? Henry wanted to know. But he had no time to follow out the thought, because a very small figure appeared holding a horse. The two talked together, and then the small one disappeared in the blackness.

Onjewonhee put his hand over Henry's mouth and held it there, not roughly but firmly, until Henry bobbed his head to let him know he meant silence. Henry felt the bridle reins thrust into his hands.

Sorghum! Even in the dark Henry could recognize Sorghum's soft muzzle against his shoulder. He was glad for the darkness that hid the affectionate greeting he gave his

horse. His own saddle too, and there was his gun thrust into his hands, and his powder horn.

One Arrow led off ahead, straight towards the North Star at first, and then directly west. Henry was so glad to have Sorghum under him that he had few thoughts for what might be going to happen. There were night sounds and insects that gnawed at their horses. Then there was the dawn before they had ridden more than two hours. It came up behind them, casting a new light on their horses, and Henry suddenly realized something had happened to Sorghum.

His mane was gone, and what was left was a dirty brown. Suddenly Henry remembered the sixth turtle shell. When had it left the tepee? He tried to see Sorghum's tail. When the poor beast fanned the flies from his flanks, Henry realized that his beautiful foam-colored tail was gone; only an ugly brown stub was left. Henry hoped they hadn't hurt too much . . . or that he hadn't kicked them too hard. He thought he knew how a mother felt when her little boy had his curls cut. He wished they had left him one thick strand of the beautiful mane.

Had they done this to degrade poor Sorghum to his master's level? Sorghum, the son of Prince, the finest stallion in the county!

They left the woods and rode out into a prairie that seemed to stretch west and north as far as they could see. There was a depression off to the north towards which the Indian headed. By the time they reached this the air was full of song and the grass full of birds. Tomorrow he might not be alive to see all of this. Henry remembered the larks in the wheat fields at home, and the quails in the hedge. He

closed his eyes and listened to the familiar flutings. It was a right nice world. The sun made their shadows stretch before them like dark carpets on the ripened prairie grass. Onjewonhee let his horse drop back with Henry, and signed to stop and get off. Henry remembered that he hadn't eaten since the dog feast and assured himself that this accounted for his sudden lightheadedness.

Onjewonhee dismounted too and made the sign for Henry to take out his pipe. Henry reached for it, but all he found was a pocketful of fragments. He looked at the Indian with surprise. Was this some trick? But Onjewonhee looked just as puzzled. Henry looked at his fingers and at the fragments; during the session with the old crones—that must have been when he did it, though he could never remember any least sensation of the breaking up.

The Indian flung up his arms and spread them in a circle and thumped Henry's chest. Henry did the same. "Haw, haw!"

Henry had learned this much Indian; it meant something like "yes" or "that's right." He wondered for a moment if this was some sign to watching red men, but nothing came of it, no war whoop, no dash of ponies or arrows.

Onjewonhee once again made the sign of silence between them and pointed to Sorghum's dyed mane and tail and again flung out his arms. He made the motion of getting on the horse and then of hurrying away to the north and west to a river. He drew the sign of river in the dew on the prairie grass. He must go west until he reached a place where two rivers joined, and then follow the larger to its source. He must hide from all men, red or white, talk to no one, let no one see his fire.

Hide. Hide. Hide.

Henry looked long at his companion, his sleek body naked except for the apron and moccasins, for he had thrown off his blanket that he might have more freedom for his gestures. In the early sun his skin was the color of corn silk that had just started to ripen; his features were even more handsome than Hez's.

The Indian made the sign for hurry again and pointed to the west.

All at once Henry knew. Why, this fellow was trying to get him away from the officers! It was all plain now; that was why he had clipped and dyed Sorghum—it was a disguise. The men at the agency had mentioned Sorghum—they would recognize him, they had probably sent out soldiers. (Henry did not know otherwise for weeks.) At the moment his gratefulness made him want to throw his arms around this savage and kiss him on the cheeks as he had heard foreigners were apt to do. Instead he clasped the boy's shoulder and bowed before him. He had absolutely no gift for the boy.

He ran his hands through his pockets. There was his knife—the one with the horn handle. Onjewonhee had liked it from the first. He could buy himself another, maybe—but days in the woods he would need it.

He held his knife out to the Indian and pointed to the red-handled one that had twanged in the watermelon. It would be awkward to carry, but it would remind him of the best Indian he'd ever known. They made the exchange. Onjewonhee grinned with pride as he hurried Henry onto his horse before he jumped to his own pony and galloped off in the direction from which they had come.

Onjewonhee guided his mount by the movements of his body, while Hank guided his by the bridle that had come from Missouri and had been made by a slave in a harness shop.

The sun was half down the sky before Henry reached the rivers. Once he had seen Indians at a distance, but they had been riding hard and paid no heed. He was sure this must be the Redwood River joining the Minnesota. His memory of figures was never accurate, but it seemed to him from the *Long's Second Expedition* that he had something like six or seven hundred miles before he could reach Fort Garry in Canada. After some thought he figured this must be about August 18. He should be at his destination in a month if he made good time. A horse like Sorghum ought to go twenty-five miles a day easily enough.

V

BUT HENRY HAD NOT COUNTED on malaria for himself and a stone bruise for poor Sorghum, or the fact that before long the entire Indian population was on the warpath, making it necessary for him to use a caution that he had never suspected possible. It was the middle of September, and he had reached the Red River, before he learned that the army in Minnesota was off to wipe out the Indians after a massacre around New Ulm.

It was at a fur-trading post that Henry heard it. The trader had sold Henry some quinine and corn meal and was glad to talk to a white man.

"Be bad for furs," the man told Henry. "No use getting the Indians on the warpath. It's all the work of some Missourians that came up here to rouse the Indians. They want to get the war up into the North and out of the South. Why, they've got proof one fellow was a Missourian. He even went to the agency and had the gall to tell the agent he'd short-changed the Indians."

"Is that so?" Henry could see he was going to make a quick getaway.

"Say, feller," the trader caught Henry's shoulder, "you do have the ager mighty bad. It's a good thing I wasn't out of quinine."

"W-what really started the war?" Henry thought that if the trader said it was the white man with his fine horse, he'd simply give himself up.

"Oh, Indians are always ready to fight. These Missourians just watched their time when the Indians was hungry and tired of warmin' their butts doin' nothin', when they should be out on their buffalo hunts. Just between you and me our business would be better if every settler this side of the Mississippi was scared out. But mind you, I ain't advocatin' uprisin's."

Henry sank back against his chair and ordered a glass of straight whisky. He sat listening to the man talk for almost three hours. During the time he'd gone through the entire cycle of malaria: chill, fever and sweat.

"All around Yankton and Sioux Falls there's been scares. But me! I ain't afraid. I give the Indian what he wants: White Father's laughing milk, beads, guns, tobacco—and he gives me hides!" He leaned close to Henry, who by now was sweating till his forehead glistened wet.

"One year I got four hundred dollars in St Paul for a pack of hides I'd paid for with thirty-two dollars' worth of junk! Fur business is plenty big wampum."

Henry nodded.

"One dame in St Paul got all of it, so here I am back again. But it was worth it."

Henry tried to grin. He wanted to lay his head on his

arms here on this table and sleep a week; the exhaustion of illness was on him. He couldn't be sure he cared whether an officer came in and took him away to the nearest army post.

"They're in need of men for the army to go fight the Indians," the trader said. "But I guess they ain't itchin' to take in a scarecrow like you. They'd probably have to shoot you after the third day out."

Henry let his head sink down on his arms and slept.

For the next three days he worked for the trader when he wasn't in the actual clutches of a chill. His head throbbed with quinine until he could scarcely hear, but he chopped a pile of wood as high as a man and twice as long, and for this the trader gave him his grub and a rug beside the fire at night. When strangers came, the trader told them this was a half-crazy nephew of his, but Henry did not care.

He listened to every word he could hear of Indian war talk. The first shots had been fired on the afternoon of August 17. That was the day Henry had gone with the Indians to get the money. Four drunken Indian duck hunters had killed a farmer named Jones, had got scared and come to the tribes to back them in a war. There had been a powwow of the tribes that night, and they had decided to go to war. (Henry thought they had probably been afraid he'd warn the white men if they let him know about it.) One tribe already had ammunition, but the rest of them went into a village and shot the storekeeper, a James Lynd, and took what they needed in guns and ammunition.

"Some said they killed five hundred whites, others said more, but still others argued that most of the whites were taken prisoner. The Indians were goin' into Canada. They're up there now around Red Lake, so some say."

Henry wondered if his own knife had been found in the heart of some white woman, or if poor Onjewonhee had been killed before he had a chance to kill. Henry couldn't see him killing a white woman; he liked to laugh too well.

On the fourth day the trader roused Henry. "You'd better get on your way, you begin to look like somethin' human. And I hear they's officers comin' through here. Your front teeth look pretty good. You could bite the cartridge all right." The trader laughed as he talked. "I've heard of them that pulled out their front teeth to keep from goin' to war, and later had to go into the cavalry. It's no business of mine if you ain't lost nothin' in that war, so git goin'! It's good four days to Pembina, that's near about in Canada."

Once across the line on the Red River, Henry realized he still had over a hundred miles to go to the first settlement. He was in the Hudson's Bay territory; there were Indians who were accustomed to the white traveler but unused to one who had no rum and tobacco to trade for furs. There was a coating of ice on all the creeks and puddles every morning now, Sorghum's mane and tail were growing out, and Henry was over the malaria, though he felt weak as a new calf and about as spindly.

The prairie grass was dry and not such good feed for the horse, though as long as they stayed right at the river there was plenty to eat. The twistings and turnings of the stream made the trip tedious. Now and then Henry bought some wild rice from a lone Indian, and always there were nuts ripe enough to eat along the banks.

On the fifth day out of Pembina the first snowstorm came down upon him, and poor, worn Sorghum refused to go

into it. Henry managed to track diagonally and get down into a clump of trees where he was able to build a fire. The Red River coiled and widened down below him, and he realized that from now on he must follow its intricate curlings rather than attempt a cross-country journey. People had told him of the Canadian winter in which the thermometer dropped from thirty-two to fifty below zero in twenty-four hours.

So much had happened to Henry in those two months of hunger and fear and loneliness that he did not much care if he froze to death in the blizzard, though he did feel sorry for poor Sorghum. He had been a good horse. Henry could scarcely remember how long ago he had started from Missouri with his saddlebags full of side meat and corn meal, and now Sorghum looked more like a starved Indian pony than a blooded five-year-old. The snow began to come fine like salt, and a wind rose to drive it like a spray of needles. There was no use trying to go on. Henry found a black-oak tree with branches that grew close to the ground; he pulled these apart on the south side so that he and Sorghum could find shelter. He remembered little Hannah asking him once why some oaks kept their leaves all winter and he didn't know what to tell her, but now he knew.

He wrapped his hickory-colored blanket around himself and lay down with his back to the trunk of the tree. It made him homesick to think of the blanket, dyed with hickory bark and woven in the big loom that stood in the kitchen during the winter . . . Ma's little feet on the treadles, her little hands throwing the shuttle back and forth.

It felt cold enough to freeze a body.

Sorghum did not cease to whinny every hour or so

throughout the long night, blasting frightened screams into the icy wind that roused Henry and made him fan his arms and stamp his feet.

At last it got to be a hideous nightmare to the boy—this scalp-raising noise, Sorghum's velvet nose, now stiff with icicles, poking into his covers. Henry reached for his gun; he would shoot the poor beast and have peace to freeze in quiet; but the snow had sifted in through the branches and covered his saddlebags and gun—he couldn't lay hands on it. There was the Indian's knife. He had heard that a horse dies easiest from a thrust at the throat.

But he could as easily thrust a knife into Joycie's arm as into Sorghum's neck. God, why couldn't he have peace? He shouted it into the blinding dark and lay down to sleep, and then rose up to remove Sorghum's halter. He would at least be free to roam the woods.

At Sorghum's next blasting, Henry did not rise. Already he could feel the stiffness at his ankles. It was a good ease that came of the silence when the echoes ceased to vibrate. Henry was seeing the snow in Missouri—it was at Relly's house, and he was before the parlor fire, putting on wood and puffing the bellows, and he could hear Delia's laugh, high and gay. Her black curls were against his face, and she was shaking him.

He opened his eyes and looked into a light. It was not Relly's fireplace, but it was more the size of a candle or a star. He tried to push it away so that he might get back his dream.

Maybe this was a new part. A white figure as tall as Pap was carrying the light, and he wore a beard like Pap's, only

it was much whiter. Entirely unlike Pap, this man was dressed from head to foot in creamy white.

This must be God.

Henry struggled to rise, but he found he was too tired. He smiled apologetically and closed his eyes. He hoped Sorghum would go to heaven, too.

The next thing Henry remembered, he was in a room alone with God. It must be God, for Henry had never seen anything or anybody like him before. He was bending over something suspended on a crane in a fireplace—not a fireplace as large as the big one at home in the kitchen, which would take a log the girth of a man, but one that burned sticks the size and length of a short man's arm.

"Dinna ye know ye was in throwin' distance o' a haeme?"

"What?" Henry had always felt sure God would speak English. He had a sick feeling: surely God wouldn't expect him to learn that awful French or Indian language.

"Ye were na distant at all fraeme me haeme, where 'twas war-r-rin an' sheltered frae man an' beast."

"Warm and sheltered!" Henry repeated the words. God wasn't a foreigner, after all. He came closer to Henry, and the light from the small fireplace shone on his whole figure; the beard and hair looked golden white like the clothes, and he had eyes of Ma's blue.

"I thought for a time ye was headin' to the finish, but dr-rink this an' ye'll be oop in nae time."

Henry felt himself raised and a hot cup pressed against his lips. He could distinctly feel his own lips.

"Say!" Henry pushed the man's hand away. "You're not God."

The white-clad figure burst out laughing.

"A long way frae it! Nor neither the divil either. I'm Josiah McQueen, an' ye're less than ten miles from For-rt Garry."

It was a disappointment to Henry.

But to Josiah McQueen it was a pleasant surprise to find that he wasn't going to have to go out in such weather to bury this giant of a fellow. He told Henry later that he had thought he was a Swede at first, and it was worrying him to think he might have to learn another tongue. Here in Canada one had to speak three or four Indian dialects, French, English, and a combination of all these. It was going to be nice to have someone that could talk civilized, but Henry didn't feel quite the same about it. That Scotch burr and those Scotch words were more troublesome than Onjewon-hee's gestures.

And that was Henry's first acquaintance with Josiah McQueen, one of the first settlers in Selkirk's colony. He was more Scotch than Henry had ever seen or heard, but his kind of stern religion was much like Pap's. Sorghum was in the barn with McQueen's short little horse and received the same amount of prairie hay each day. Henry became an apprentice in the business of tanning and tailoring buffalo hides into white suits such as McQueen wore. They found a ready sale to the officers of the Hudson's Bay Company.

When the weather cleared, it settled down to Indian summer for a week, and Henry and McQueen went into the woods along the river for nuts. To Henry's surprise there was an abundant crop of hazelnuts that filled his heart to bursting with a longing for Ma's sorghum taffy with nuts and the bank beside the creek where the bushes grew.

There were still vegetables in the garden that must be dug and stored for spring or taken in the cart to Fort Garry for the company's table. Henry was too tired at night to long for home and too busy by day to give it more than a passing thought.

McQueen was well known for his honest measure, so his homemade soap, his vegetables, his barley were accepted in good trade for matches and tea and sugar. He didn't have to get tobacco because he grew his own south of the barn in a little patch that he could cover in case of early frosts.

At Fort Garry, Henry found that the taking of Harper's Ferry by the Confederates was still news. Henry had been in Minnesota when that happened. He managed to buy a book that contained a map of the United States. The book was printed in French, but the towns were named so that he could recognize them.

He pored over this by the light of the fire, if he read at night, because McQueen did not like to burn his candles.

McQueen taught him the manner of curing buffalo hides. Some they left white to sell to the Hudson's Bay officers, but others they waterproofed by smoke to trade to the other settlers. McQueen came by great quantities of them by trading his tobacco to the Indians.

"This will not always be a huntin' ground. Ye'll live to see the day that farmers own the place," McQueen told Henry one night as they ate their Scotch barley soup. "Lord Selkirk knew the trappin' would run out someday and they'd be needin' of somethin' else."

It pleased Henry to think of this wilderness covered with good farms and substantial houses like his pap's in Missouri, but so far as he could see, there were only the bare plain and

cabins along the river front, with land extending back a half-mile into the woods.

McQueen told Henry of the war between the companies and the final grant of the entire tract of land to the control of the Hudson's Bay Company who had the power to drive him from his land if they'd want, but who had promised to leave alone those already settled, just so no more came out.

"Should I marry wi' an Indian or a half-breed and beget settlers?" The old man laughed scornfully. "I started out wi' a woman from Scootland, but she fell wi' the cholera. Maybe 'tis for the best, though ther's been times when I wanted me a woman in the haeme. A woman is as gentle, Henry, if she is the gentle kind and like the divil hi'self let loose hadna she gentleness."

Henry had a surge of remembrance of Delia and her fine ways, her hair soft against his face, her skin as fresh cream against his lips. She had clung to him that day in the woods. He could feel her tight warm hands on his arms.

And then he had to get up to pace the cabin, knocking his shins on the pile of wood, the stretching frame, a chest of oak.

"As a man thinketh in his heart . . ." and Delia was married to Jerm Hubbard.

The old man was clearing the dishes, and Henry, unlike his usual custom, pulled on his coat and slammed out into the cold night.

The air was uncanny in its clearness. A new moon curved in the west, and a planet blazed close by, but to Henry they were only sources of light that kept him from hiding from himself.

He might be lying in a camp in Mississippi or Virginia or

Tennessee or even in Missouri, thinking about a furlough to go back to Delia. Lord, why can't a man get a woman out of his brain! She was like a sickness he had heard of that, once in your blood, may someday get to your brain and make you crazy. He hadn't seen her face for over a year, and yet she was closer to him than old McQueen or this night or the very white buffalo skins that clothed his body. He walked on into the night until he was so cold that he must return. It wouldn't be long until Christmas. Think of Christmas away from home! All the family around the table talking about crops and weather, and what would they say about him? There would be turkey and ham and maybe a roasted leg of lamb, and pies and fruitcake and baked squash and baked potatoes and giblet gravy with blobs of butter, and Joycie would beg Ma to let her fish out the heart if Ma hadn't already laid it on her plate . . . and Jim would be there with Vida . . . but what was he thinking? All of the boys wouldn't get furloughs to come home! Maybe they weren't all alive to come home!

Home!

The cabin of McQueen's was a home to him after the months in the open, but he needed children around him, and women's voices, Joycie with her pert ways and turned-up nose, and Hannah as quiet as a whippoorwill in daytime. He'd been brought up wrong with women always about, he liked to hear their skirts, to watch their hands carding wool, knitting socks, peeling potatoes. He tried to think of one thing about all the women he'd known, one thing that would make them live and walk beside him. It must be their talk, it was so quick and light . . . the way they chattered at their work. No, it wasn't talk . . . Ma

never chattered. He could smell Ma's pipe, hickory smoke, whole cloves that she sometimes carried in her pocket. He simply wallowed in his homesickness. Even Vida Holtz, that Jim had married, had a nice way about her if you forgot that she was five years older than Jim. She always smelled as clean as a scrubbed milk crock. There was something you had to like and look up to in Vida Holtz. Why did everybody still call her Vida Holtz, now that she'd married Jim? Was it because you always knew she owned the farm and hired and fired the hands? And George's wife, who was plain, had friendly eyes, though her tongue got as sharp as a new-honed razor if she didn't get her way. He really felt he liked her least of all the women he could remember. He'd think of her to make himself glad to be shed of women for a while.

There were voices in the cabin when he came up outside. Henry wondered if he should walk farther, but he knew he was too cold. He could go into the barn and get warm beside Sorghum, but he called at the door instead.

"Come in, Henry! These are Sioux from the States. Maybe ye hae met them."

Henry came forward to look into the faces of three Indian men. "I'm sorry, Mr McQueen, but I cain't remember their faces. Ask them do they know me." Henry was glad when they signed that they did not.

Henry dozed by the fire while they talked. He would have liked to ask them about Onjewonhee, but they seemed to be wrapped up in their own story. At last they got up and left with heavy sacks of food under their arms, and McQueen could tell Henry their story. It was so sad it made Henry ashamed of himself and his grief and loneliness.

There were three left from a family of seven sons; they were the children of one chief by three wives, but they had been brought up in the same lodge and felt as close as white brothers. Their father had not wanted to go on the war-path because he had listened to the missionaries, but they had been young and tired of tame life on the reservation. Their wives were slim with hunger in the winter, and their sons were weak and died in the cold of the year. It was not natural for Indians to be fed out of a store instead of from the woods and plains. The Great Mystery had filled the woods with berries and rice and little animals, the streams with fish, the prairies with buffalo, all the red man needed. But the White Father wanted the land for his white children, so he bought it, but he could not pay as he promised. Indians always pay what they promise, or other Indians go on warpath to take of him what he neglect to pay.

That was what the Indians had done. And now the White Father was chasing them with soldiers. He had taken many of their brethren and their father and kept them in a great house to hang on feast days, to make a great show in the moon of difficulty (January). Not like Indians, kill quick and in anger, but slow, keeping the brothers in closed boxes away from the Great Mystery.

They wanted the Scotsman to give them meal to feed their hungry wives and children. They had driven oxen, the animals of white farmers, hitched to great traveaux that sang as they crossed the plains.

Henry remembered the ox wagons he had ferried across the Missouri River and their creaking wheels.

"And you gave them food?"

"What else? The Lord prospereth me. One winter I had

nae haeme, Indians gi' me pemmican and a place beside their fires. They would ha' gi' me to wife, but I didna wish it."

From 1818 to 1862 alone. Henry wondered if he would live so long alone. 1818. Why, Ma was just a little girl then, hadn't even thought of Pa or marryin' or comin' to Missouri.

"You best keep out o' sight o' these half-breeds wi' your goldish hair and rosy face. They will want tae make o' ye a married mahn." McQueen's eyes twinkled—or were they glistening with tears?

"I should be leavin' this place, with the Indians needin' your extra food an' winter closin' in hard." Henry looked about the room, at the two bunks (McQueen had shown Henry how to build one against the side wall), the snug fireplace, the long table on which they ate, pounded hides, sewed or even laid their soap to dry. There were always leather suits in the process of being made, or leather in the process of being cured. They did the scraping and soaping in a lean-to at the back, but all the other work they did in here. Strangely, the place did not stink any more than a harness shop or a saddlery.

He knew he would miss the smell if he should leave, and then too he would miss McQueen's cranberry jam and stews and rye bread baked on the hearth with a faint taste of wood smoke.

"Nae, Henry, you needna leave. I'm not as young as I once was, you can make me trips to the for-rt, an' carry the wood, and in time you might take over the close work. You're a right smart hand wi' the cuttin'."

So Henry stayed on. He gave himself over to duties of

each day. He spent hours caring for Sorghum, smoothing his coat, trimming his mane and tail. It wouldn't be many months until that tail would be like foam again. He taught Sorghum to draw McQueen's high, two-wheeled cart, piled with vegetables or suits made of cured buffalo hides.

Sometimes it seemed to Henry that he had never lived in Missouri and had never seen Ellery die or climbed a tree to take little Hannah down. It was all like a dream or a story he had heard about somebody else, all except Delia, and sometimes at night he would wake with a start, sure that he had heard her laugh.

And one night he remembered that the laugh that he had heard in his dream was not Delia's but that of the Indian girl who had come that day with her little brother to get meal from McQueen. Henry wished he had learned to talk Sioux, so that he could know what they were laughing about. Now that he was awake he realized that the laugh was different from Delia's—it was deeper, and came out pure joy, not part sarcasm.

"Her name is Tasseto Zitka, Evening Bird," old McQueen had told Henry when she was gone.

"I have a little sister named Joycie," Henry said. "Her eyes are just as big and blue as Evening Bird's are big and brown."

"Now, Henry," McQueen said, "you must learn to say 'Zitka.' That is the name o' her."

Henry had said the name over several times, and always saw the bunchy little creature crouched there on McQueen's stool, with her eyes as alert as some wild animal's, shy, yet watchful. He hoped he'd recognize her the next time he saw her, but he doubted it, for all Indians looked

alike to him. She did wear a strange cloak made of muskrat skins sewn in such a way that the white bellies of the animals made broad stripes down the back and sides. The hood was entirely white.

The next day, as Henry returned from Fort Garry with the cart, he overtook a couple of Indians. At once he recognized the taller one as Zitka in her strange coat.

He stopped the cart and called her name. "Would you all like a ride?"

Zitka smiled and bowed to him but shook her head so that Henry knew she didn't understand. He climbed down from the cart into the snow beside the roadway and put his great hands under the arms of the little boy to show that he would put him into the cart.

The little Indian looked half scared to death and reached for his sister.

"Don't you see? Both of you ride." He wished he'd never started this, but now that he had halted the cart he wouldn't be the fool to climb back in and drive away.

"Ride," he shouted, as if the two were deaf. He made a trotting motion as he held imaginary lines in his hands.

He must have looked a clown. The little boy almost laughed. The girl bobbed her head and lifted her little brother up to the wheel hub.

Henry took the child from her and swung him lightly into the cart. It wouldn't be so easy to swing the sister. But to his surprise he almost swung the girl over and beyond the cart. She must be near about all clothes; in spite of that riggin' she was as light as Delia.

Zitka laughed out loud at this, just as she had laughed when McQueen talked to her in the cabin.

Henry's face felt hot, and so he got out his pipe to hide his unmanneredness. The two Indians stood in the cart like two little dummies, their hands lost in their sleeves, their faces round and smooth as clay on a wet hill.

If he could just talk to them he wouldn't need to feel such an awkward ox of a fellow. They might even be Onjewonhee's relatives. He remembered that Indian's laugh, his curiosity, and tried to see something of the same in these two little stuffed savages. It must be the season that made the difference. There surely wasn't anything like One Arrow's handsomeness in these little bunches of fur. Nothing alive about them except their eyes.

He remembered that he had bought some chocolate. He took out a piece and handed it to the girl. She gave two thirds of it to the boy. As they licked the sweets they no longer looked like little dummies. This very act of eating made them at once human and real to Henry for all their savage dress and silent manners.

The girl did have a gentle way of looking at a person—yes, even gentler than Hannah or anyone Henry had ever seen before. She was solemn and quiet as a church, and yet, since he gave her the chocolate, happy.

He wished he could ask her about Onjewonhee—One Arrow of the painted knife. At last when the two had finished their chocolate he took out the knife and showed it to them. He beat the air with gestures, trying to make them understand, but they only laughed at the white man's strange dance.

Henry was happy for this joyous sound. He suddenly felt young. Why, this was what he'd been wanting, somebody to play with, someone who would laugh.

He surprised himself at his powers of inventing things that would make little savages giggle. He would whistle to Sorghum and make him stop dead in his tracks and cause the three in the cart to all but lose their balance, or he would drive around a curve so that they would have to clutch the sides to keep from rolling like apples in a basket. He even sang them a couple of songs, church songs, in fact, but he made up gestures that would have startled the parson.

When they reached the bend in the road above the Indian camp, Henry was almost sorry. He knew now how much strength it took to lift such a light person as little Zitka from the cart. He wished he had something he could give them, as Ma used to do when she had enjoyed strangers—a batch of soap, a glass of jelly or even a loaf of bread.

He patted his pockets and called the Indians back to give them the rest of the chocolate. The little boy's hands stretched greedily towards the gift, but Henry divided it and gave half to Zitka. "Not agin, you don't," he said, wagging his finger at her. "He had more than his share of the other." Henry smiled so that she knew he wasn't scolding.

That night he felt so good that he wrote a letter to Relly which he would send to the States when the post went down to Pembina on the back of a half-breed from Fort Garry. But Henry was not with McQueen when her answer reached him, months later. He had been gone for six months, and he never lived long enough to get over being sorry he hadn't gone sooner.

He was always trying to figure in his mind just what he did that caused so much grief. How was he supposed to know Indian customs? But he would hear himself say

"self-righteous." But old McQueen helped pack him a saddlebag and told him to go on and forget it all. But you don't forget things like that so easy. If he'd only gone when he first realized the Indians from Minnesota were hiding in Canada! But those following days had been the happiest of all the days at McQueen's, for Henry had liked the Indians, and he had enjoyed being kind to Zitka and her little brother more than to the rest.

She could sit longer and stare at him out of her soft doe's eyes, she could make finer moccasins, she could find more excuses for coming than any of the others. After that ride in the cart she was less shy with Henry when she came to McQueen for meal, and she didn't take her exchange under her cloak and scurry away like a scared animal. Yet nobody could ever accuse her of boldness.

Every time she came Henry resolved to learn enough of her words to talk to her, but always forgot until she was there again with a beautiful piece of handiwork that she wanted to trade for food. They managed to get along pretty well with signs and gestures; it was like a game to Henry.

He did remember to buy her a nice packet of beads on his next trip to town, and to give them to her while McQueen was out filling a sack with food. Henry couldn't endure for McQueen to tease him about buying beads for the little Indian.

Then one afternoon just after New Year's, when McQueen had gone to Fort Garry, she brought a vest that she had made. It was embroidered in porcupine quills and human hair and the very beads that he had given her. The

vest was big enough for Henry, so he told her he would buy it and asked by gestures what she wanted in return.

She shook her head and looked down at the floor, her hands busy with the beads about her throat.

Henry wished McQueen would come back to tell him what she wanted. At last he took out his knife that Onje-wonhee had given him; he hated to part with it, but nothing he offered seemed to satisfy her. She pointed to Henry's hair and to the hair embroidered on the vest.

You could have heard Henry's laugh a quarter of a mile away. "So you want some of my hair to make a vest for some Indian brave! All right!" Henry took the knife and singled out a lock of hair at the back where it would not be missed and gave it to her.

He did it all with great haste and impulsiveness. She was such a funny little creature in her white hood, pushed back on her shoulders, and her black hair as slick as a beaver's, so that she actually reminded him of a little water animal. It really was strange, but she wasn't as plump as most Indian girls and not half as plump as he had thought she was.

She took the lock of hair and put it inside a fine leather bag and hid it in her blouse, then unfastened the braided cord around her fur cloak. She let it slide off to the stool and stood there before him in her creamy white dress and leggings made of softest buffalo skins. She stood there so still, with her hands folded over her breast, her shiny black hair like a hood over her ears, that she looked like some precious idol.

For a moment Henry wanted to bow before her to kneel and worship. He knew it was a sin, but she did look so pretty. And then he knew he wanted to take her in his

arms, that this feeling for her had nothing to do with worship. If this wasn't old McQueen's house he'd take her where she stood. He'd win her for his own. To hell with Delia and her white saintliness. His hands went out to touch the girl, to stroke her cheeks, to get accustomed to her nearness.

She did not cringe or respond to his touch; she raised her head and looked into his eyes with such gentle tenderness, such love he had not dreamed. She said some words that he could not understand, strange and quick. Henry let his hands smooth down to her shoulders; the well-cured buffalo skin was like velvet to his fingers.

And then she walked from him, her moccasined feet making no sound upon the floor, straight to McQueen's bed and lay herself down, arms folded like a mummy, except that her eyes were open, watching him.

Henry started as if he had been struck. What was he thinking! And she had read his mind.

"Why, you little devil." It had all been a trick, her standing there so humble and religious-like. "If old McQueen knew you were that kind he'd kick you out for good." His breath was short.

She kept looking at Henry with her fine round eyes.

"And don't you think you can hypnotize me so you can go tell your father and brothers and get them after my *whole* scalp. Get out!"

She sat up on the bed, and if Henry hadn't been so surprised by her whole conduct he might have taken pity on her sadness and left the house himself.

"Get out, I say!" he shouted and signed to her. After all, he did owe something to McQueen.

Zitka crouched there as if frightened; she had heard the words "get out" enough to know their meaning. With her eyes she begged him to have mercy, all the while she got into her cloak.

She left the room as quietly as a wraith, and Henry, there alone, sat down upon the stool that she had quitted. He felt weak in the knees and slightly ill. He owed those Indians something, but not that much. He owed McQueen far more. But most of all he was white, and though not Scotch like old McQueen, he'd keep his own self-respect, though he had to live here forty years. Her skin was copper, yet it might be as soft as Delia's and as fragrant. She would have been sweet to hold—God, how he knew it! He closed his eyes, and saw her eyes, reproachful as she left, hurt like a wounded doe.

He wanted to shout to the four walls, to break things, to cry into the night. But she wasn't white; it was better as it was.

Henry had not heard the step at the door. McQueen came in and startled him.

"It's turnin' colder, an' there's snow comin' by mornin'."

"Yes." Henry did not know whether to tell or not. He could not keep his voice steady.

"What's this?" McQueen had seen the vest.

"An Indian brought it. I couldn't get her to take it back, though she would take no pay—except a lock of my hair." He didn't need to tell him more.

"Who?"

"Zitka."

"Did she make as if to stay here permanent?" The old man was suddenly excited.

"She did, but a lot of good it did her."

"Quick, boy, what did ye do? Where di' she get the beads?"

"I gave them to her."

Henry stood up, and here he thought the old man would be proud of him for turning his back on sin.

"That's the beads ye gi' her an' her hair i' a jacket, an' ye gi' her a lock o' yours. My boy, ye took a wife an' threw her out i' the night. We must find her before it's too late."

A wife! And he'd misjudged her, almost cursed her.

At once Henry knew the need for hurry. It would have been better that he sin. At the door they saw her snowshoes. Old McQueen went back into the room for the jacket she had made.

"We may be able to save your skin." There was a moon rising from the rags of cloud that scuttled through the windy night.

The two men followed the footprints in the snow, their own snowshoes obliterating them as they went.

"I never told ye, Henry, but I pray the same thing didna happen tae ye as it did tae me."

Henry had been following the tracks so closely, and wondering what he would say to little Zitka to make her understand, that old McQueen saw it first. Henry looked up at his exclamation. He ran to cut her down, and held the small form in his arms.

"Oh, God—for righteousness!" Her neck was broken; she must have tied the belt to the limb and round her neck and run against it, for her knees were in the snow, bent under her as if in prayer.

"But there's no use to pack the things," Henry kept saying as old McQueen laid out pemmican and fixed a fire bag. "I'll let them catch me, I need to die. I want to die, I'll beg 'em to kill me anyway, and if they won't I'll fall on Onjehonhee's knife."

"No, Henry." McQueen put in tobacco and shavings and a pipe. "Ye have not the right of sayin' when ye quit. Zitka knows no ither law. Ye ha' been brought up wi' righteousness. A snow maybe God sent to cover what ha' been done this nicht."

"I'll go, because you say so, but I'll find a way to die." Henry carried in his pocket a letter to the chief factor at Fort Garry, seven miles away.

"There's a dog train at Garry leaving for Fort à la Corne, I happen to know. Maybe, Henry, another act of God."

"But Sorghum?"

"Ye can't take him i' weather like this where ye're going. Besides, the Hudson's Bay Company furnishes its own transportation. Ye may earn a place for yer'sel' wi' them, ye're strong and brave, and young too, Henry."

VI

HENRY MUSHED AHEAD making a path for the dogs. These days he always took the hardest task as his own, though there were three outfits and plenty of half-breeds to do the work. To Henry it was one more method of bringing about a quick end. For seven days he had been with the dog train headed for Fort à la Corne, and he was surprised that he had lived so long.

He had once heard the story of an old Indian chief who lay on a hill and starved himself to death when his family had been stricken with smallpox. Henry knew he could never do that, for when it came time to make camp and boil the tea he was the first to lend an extra hand to hasten the process. Indians really didn't need a John Brown like the Negroes to get people stirred up about them—they only needed that people know them better, they were strong.

The pemmican, though frozen solid, was soon sending out appetizing fragrance as it warmed over the fire, and

Henry could feel his appetite become almost as vicious as that of the dogs now tearing at their frozen fish. From now on the men would have to kill their own food or go hungry. Strange how people up here trusted to the kill of the moment.

For no good reason Henry sailed into one of the half-breeds who was trying to get more than his share of the food. Henry thought the fellow would probably pull a knife on him and the whole thing would be over. To Henry's surprise the half-breed merely divided the food he had appropriated and at once started calling Henry "Mist' 'Enry." The chief factor, Mr Martin, from Fort à la Corne, noted Henry's show of energy and asked that he be assigned to his dog team.

Henry, who knew nothing about the processes of favors in the Hudson's Bay Company, did not realize his good fortune, but went on volunteering for the most hazardous service. It was he who went ahead to test the ice on the river, and he indeed who fell in feet first and thought "At last . . ." until he remembered that, strapped to *his* back, was the supply of powder that was to make the kill for the next meals! So he had to fight his way to the leather thong the half-breeds were extending, and had to come out of the river to find himself a human icicle before a fire could be built.

"Now," thought Henry, "I know I'll die. No human body can live through this without lung fever." But he had not counted on his own constitution or the healthful air or the anger of Mr Martin.

"I thought I told you to stay with my sled? No need to go committing suicide, when you're the only man who can

talk almost decent English in this hole of foreign tongues. You young fool, see that you take care of yourself in the future!"

So Henry was dried off and wrapped in buffalo robes. His load and part of that from one of the sleds were divided among the half-breeds, who did not complain at the added burden because perhaps they realized that Henry's ducking had saved them from a worse fate.

"Can you shoot as well as you can swim in ice water?" Mr Martin asked Henry when they stopped for the night.

"I can shoot."

The factor laughed. "Tomorrow when we hunt you shall go with me."

By all good fortune and the fact that Mr Martin's gun jammed, Henry shot the jumping deer that provided their day's food.

He couldn't believe it himself. With McQueen he had not once used his gun on anything bigger than a squirrel. The season for hunting buffalo around the Red River had already passed, and Henry had not gone on any of the distant hunts. And now that he had not died or been killed, though the eyes of the deer reminded him of Zitka, he wanted to live, to hunt again, to live his days. He wondered how McQueen had fared at the questioning. He had known the Indians for years; he knew their habits and was trusted by them.

When, at last, they came in sight of Fort à la Corne, Henry thought he was about to witness an Indian massacre. The fort was completely surrounded by Indians, and the gates were closed.

Mr Martin at once ordered all guns out of sight, which to Henry was a questionable procedure. The man got from his sled and started walking towards the fort.

"Henry," he said, without raising his voice or turning his head, "follow me as closely as you dare, and if any brave offers to slash me with a knife give it to him with your fists as you know how."

Martin, about fifty, who had come to this country years before, seemed to know his way with the Indians. He pulled off his bearskin gloves and started waving to the red men, bowing, raising his arm in recognition of the most bedecked, especially the one who wore the plug hat with the plumes in front.

Henry had never seen anything to compare with this. His own Indian experience in Minnesota in summer, when most of them wore breech cloths, was nothing. The finery on these Indians was like Joycie's when she dressed up in some of Relly's old clothes—only they were grown, these Indians, and they carried guns and knives.

All at once they surrounded Henry and the factor, and but for the man's restraining hand on his arm Henry would have started fighting.

When they reached the gates, Henry and the rest looked as if they were painted with vermillion, too.

"Quick," Martin directed, "to the rum, and don't spare the water."

He had complete command of the situation within ten minutes, though to Henry it looked like a case of absolute confusion. The gates were opened, and five of the warriors were permitted to enter on condition that they leave their guns outside. They could see already the preparation for a

celebration, so they agreed to the provision. They were asked to select five of their ablest and strongest men to help with the trade. This of course meant that those could not have any of the rum until the trade was completed. It took only a matter of moments for the selections to be made. It all seemed practiced to Henry, like some crazy medicine show or even a part of a circus.

With considerable suspicion Henry watched these five gigantic painted Indians with their war weapons. It seemed foolhardy to him to let these wild-looking men try to enforce obedience upon their tribesmen. Henry could think of a dozen safer ways, but the factor seemed entirely at ease. Mr Martin brought out the calumet and lighted up.

And this too seemed slow to Henry. The Indians sat on benches, and the factor with pomp and ceremony took three puffs from the long pipe and handed it to the chief with the plug hat. He took three puffs and passed the pipe on to the man with the one eye and six feathers. It must have taken at least an hour to make the circle, and the sun was but that much from setting.

Henry, who had been designated as bartender because he was the largest, waited with the rum. Henry Brown of Missouri served rum to a tribe of Cree Indians while the chief factor and his assistants bargained for their furs and fats. The first drink around was undiluted. Henry tasted it and decided it wasn't such a bad idea to weaken it down, but by the seventh drink around there was almost nothing left but the smell.

He watched the Indians lay a pack of furs on the floor and start bargaining. He was already familiar with the "Made-Beaver" point of exchange, but it did look like high

selling to give the Indians only five balls and two ounces of powder for four cured buffalo tongues, or for that matter one whole buffalo cow cut up ready to cook. There were great bladders filled with fat, and in this cold weather there was no danger of them getting away, but around one hundred pounds of that grease bought only one scalping knife or a bunch of seed beads. One pound of vermilion (of which four fifths was ordinary flour) cost what was to Henry an unbelievable amount—three cured buffalo robes or skins of one silver and one red fox.

When one group had spent all of their trade material, they would go outside to make room for others. Often Henry had to assist them from their places. The state of merriment and disorder merely made those outside more eager to get in. To see a chief turn over three good horses for an army coat with gold braid, a plug hat with a feather, and a pair of red pants was almost more than even Henry's sense of humor could appreciate. Horseflesh to Henry was still precious.

When the trading was over, Henry went into the dining room as a full-fledged clerk of the Hudson's Bay Company.

"I tell you, Henry, you have the makings of an excellent trader. You're big enough to command respect, and you will not stand any foolery," Mr Martin praised him.

Henry was to receive seventeen pounds a year for his services, and must be willing to go to any of the posts at command.

Henry almost felt he wasn't earning his money, for hunting was so good, better than he had read about in books. Even Pa had never told stories of such hunting. There were buffalo on the plains, bear and deer and moose in the woods,

and all kinds of smaller animals, and this company made money out of this pleasure of hunting. Henry could hardly wait for his first buffalo hunt. He thought it was going to be pretty hard to skin one of the big animals, but he was willing to try.

When the weather broke, he and Mr Martin and a guide took a pack horse and went hunting. There was no need for a guide, because Mr Martin knew the country as Henry knew his own neighborhood, yet they took one along.

They rode all morning before they sighted a herd feeding off to the west. Both of them had good horses.

"Now shoot to kill, and remember the hide of a buffalo is tougher than tanned shoe leather, and guide yourself accordingly."

Mr Martin looked proud, and Henry wanted to make a good showing before him. Henry thought he'd make a robe and send it back to Relly to have for the boys. He rode as fast as he could until he was alongside the big creatures. They were huge compared to his horse; he wondered how he would cart the thing home. He hadn't been so happy since he had run races with Onjewonhee. He could feel the wind whistling around his ears as he sped along beside the herd, now closer and closer until he could smell the strong animal of them; their great shoulders rubbed, their little legs threshed at the ground.

Henry got his gun ready to fire, and all at once he had buck fever. The thing was so close, he'd always wanted to shoot a buffalo, and here he was with the thing right in front of his gun and he couldn't pull the trigger. He heard a loud report. Mr Martin must have fired. Henry was disgusted and sick with excitement. The animal was beginning

to do a peculiar kind of sidling dance, and then he fell so that Henry had to pull up his horse or stumble over the beast.

"Bravo, bravo!" Henry heard the words. What could Mr Martin mean, bragging at his own shot, but as Henry lowered his gun to get off his horse, the muzzle was hot.

"By damn I did shoot it!" He felt like a little boy who has caught his first fish. He ran on ahead, his knife out to finish the buffalo.

"Fine!" Mr Martin came up to Henry. "He's a good size, too! What a tongue!"

Henry didn't quite understand where to start skinning. "You'll have to tell me where to begin," Henry said, a little awed. His voice caught in his throat.

"Just open the jaws and cut out the tongue, that's all."

"All!" Henry's voice must have shown some of his astonishment.

"Sure. The Indians can do our skinning and dressing for us. We never bother with anything but the tongues. Come along, we'll probably get three or four like that today. Leave it to the wolves."

Henry looked at the great curly hump of the beast. He had been wonderful in his strength. Henry knew he could not bend down and slash out that tongue; it would be some kind of desecration. Not just the tongue. Such a waste he could not endure.

"I guess you'd better do it for me," he told the Indian guide. Relly wouldn't get a robe from the first buffalo he had shot. Someday he would come out alone when he could skin any creature he might kill.

"Come along, Henry, before they get out of sight."

As the ice began to go out of the Saskatchewan River, Henry was given orders to be ready to go through to York factory on Hudson's Bay.

"You'll be the first to see the newspapers," one of the clerks told him. "You'll just be in luck."

But it put a damper on Henry's high spirits. Suppose he should learn that there were two countries now, North and South? But what could he do about it?

Just as he was ready to go in one of the twenty-foot boats that came from Edmonton, his orders were revoked and he was sent upstream to help rebuild one of the trading posts in the mountains that had been unoccupied for two years. A young and ambitious factor had decided that he could make a success of the mountain outpost since he had been there one year with good results. So in June 1863 Henry started his first river trip in a long boat propelled by voyageurs. The clerk of the post had gone on ahead.

The boat was loaded with supplies and materials for building. The materials for trading would come up later when the boats returned from York factory (and the papers, Henry kept telling himself).

The young clerk, Lessups, of Jasper House, was only five years older than Henry, but he had been here in Canada under the Hudson's Bay rule since he was seventeen. He was a lean fellow who looked ten years older than he was, but anyone knew he would look the same for the next fifteen or twenty years. His eyes were gray and far apart in his narrow head, his jaw was too long, his teeth were uneven, but Henry liked him in spite of the fact that he hoped sincerely he'd never have to fight with him.

Lessups told Henry he was queer not to enjoy buffalo hunting.

"I guess it's because I was brought up to be savin' of meat," Henry said.

"Well, that doesn't account for you not laughing when the Indians are 'in trade.' "

Henry hated to have to explain why he didn't like this part of the company's business.

"I know!" Lessups tried to cover Henry's discomfort. "You've got an idea somewhere inside you that it's not right to get a savage drunk."

"I guess that's it." And then Henry blurted out, "But that ain't all. To steal from him after he's drunk—that's rotten!"

"You're a fool, Henry, but just the kind of a fool I'd like to hook up with to get away from this company. Why don't we do trapping on our own this winter? You know we're allowed to if we do it on our own time. We'd only get the prices paid the Indians, but we could stay sober and count straight."

As they worked on the trading post, building the house and fortifications, Henry thought of the matter. He never let his thinking interfere with his work, because he realized he was stronger than Lessups and should take more than his share of the heavy work.

He finally decided to go in with Lessups. Henry was to cure and pack the hides while Lessups ran the traps and attended to the selling.

That summer the two of them did a great deal of exploring through the mountains after they finished their

repairs and made their supply of winter meat sure—mountain sheep and moose, with dried white fish for the dogs.

Lessups was a restless fellow, and often when Henry would sooner spend two or three days fishing at some place, Lessups would be off hunting richer ground. But Henry did not realize that this very restlessness was a part of the job. He was always talking to Lessups about the day when this part of Canada would be settled.

"Mind you don't ever mention to any of the Hudson's Bay people that I agree with you, Henry. Settlements are poison to the fur trade."

Henry would look down the valley and contradict himself and Lessups. "They ain't ever goin' to get this place civilized, and I hope they don't. What will happen to the Indians?"

"They'll probably have each other killed off by then. Look at the tribes dying all the time—the Snake tribe, for example."

When they got back to Jasper House the last of October, the boat of supplies was there.

"—and the newspapers," Henry thought.

He fell to unpacking. He did everything possible before he got to the question that was eating a hole right through his thinking.

"The papers? Where's the papers?"

Lessups looked at Henry. "I always have them left at Edmonton, then I can read straight through the year once I get started. I'm not much for this business of taking off a paper a day, always a year late."

Edmonton! They might almost as well be in New Orleans.

"Say, don't look so disappointed, Henry, we'll go down to Edmonton for Christmas. That is, if the snows aren't too heavy. But isn't this a letter for you?"

A letter! Henry felt his throat swell.

The letter was addressed in Relly's fine hand, and it had come to Fort Garry and been forwarded by McQueen.

Lessups and the guides were watching. Lessups with his wide-apart eyes and thin face suddenly turned on the guides: "Get the hell out of here. Don't you know there's a moose out there to be dressed and six buffalo tongues to smoke? We'd better be at it."

Henry could not see the letter before him; he bowed his head upon the table. A year and three months away without a word from home. So much had happened to him since he wrote the letter Relly was answering that he was afraid to read what had happened to them.

All at once he knew that he had been trying to forget, to keep them out of his thinking so it wouldn't hurt too much to be cut off like this. They had been together, and they didn't need him, there were so many others to take his place with everyone but Ma.

What if something had happened to her? "O God, You can't let anything happen to her, or to Hannar, or to Pap," he prayed, and then he went through all the list of brothers and sisters and then their wives and husbands and children—he even included Ed and Vinnie and Vida Holtz, the in-laws he'd liked least. It was like an Indian smoking his pipe to four directions to get favor with the Great Mystery.

He opened the letter and was surprised to find it written on wrapping paper. Fine sister Relly come to this!

She started out by asking him to please excuse the paper

as it was all she could get. Of course Pa could get all of anything he needed, but she'd never dare ask him for paper, or he might ask her if she was writing to Henry, he'd grown that suspicious.

. . . Ma hadn't been very well since Thomp was killed. It was so close to home it seemed a shame they couldn't have brought his body back to bury it in decency in the graveyard, but he'd been buried in a trench with nineteen others. For five days before they got the word that Thomp was dead, Ma couldn't bear the mention of his name without crying.

"We thought it queer, but when we heard, we understood that sometimes folks like Ma don't have to depend on all these modern conveniences like telegraphs and postal service."

. . . Delia took Thomp's baby—she was born three days after Thomp was killed at Independence August 12, and named Thomasina. Sara (Thomp's wife) lived only one week longer. Poor Delia needed something; her husband was killed in action, and her father had just about gone off his mind with special taxes and uncertainties besides the grief he'd borne. . . .

There was so much sadness in the paragraph that Henry felt no rush of hope that even yet he might have Delia. She was someone else, taking care of little red-haired Sina—Thomasina.

"So far as I know Nate is still alive, but I have heard nothing from him since you left. It's hard, Henry, this uncertainty, but yet I *feel* that he's alive. I need him here, the bushwhackers keep us in constant terror.

"Maria sleeps with a gun between her and the baby. But I guess with Ed home on furlough she feels safe enough. He looks too well fed. I couldn't bring myself to sit down at the table with him. He might kill Nate, or maybe already has!

"I guess I should tell you the other side of the story too. Quantrell is in the country around here now, and making it hot for the Federalists. Some of his men came to Ma's the other day and made her get a meal for them. I could have killed them then myself, even though they are on Nate's side. That poor little Ma, there in the house alone and them ordering her around! She'd hid her last ham in the hole under the floor boards, along with Pa's gun, and they asked for ham!

"She told them she didn't have ham but if they'd shoot a chicken she'd dress one and fry it for them—and you know Ma—they believed her and didn' even search the house. She was so scared Pa would come in and get himself shot that she fried that chicken in her last butter rather than go to the springhouse for lard.

"By the way, Hez Eagan disappeared and so did poor Widow Patch's horse. Along about the time you went away. And would you believe it? Mrs Patch wouldn't even let them get out a posse to hunt for him.

"Little Hannah takes the team to the hazel brush every day to hide them. Can you imagine Pa with just one team on the place?"

Henry read the letter through until he knew it by heart, and then he called Lessups. "Do you suppose I could have

my seventeen pounds sent to my sister in Missouri when my year is up?"

"Henry, are you a fool? You'll need *some* clothes and other things. Don't give away all your money."

"But I thought we were going to trap on our own."

"All right, all right! But don't forget I told you not to." He scowled down at Henry. "You can send word to the factor in Edmonton, and he'll see your money gets sent off. I'd suggest you just send, say, seven pounds, that's about thirty-five dollars."

When the voyageurs went back to Edmonton, they took Henry's message.

Lessups didn't question Henry directly, but days later, as they stretched a choice black fox they had caught, he suggested, "Wouldn't you like one of these made up for your sister?"

"Oh, I don't know." It would seem too silly, when she maybe needed food, to send her a black-fox fur piece.

"You could send it to Duluth and have it made up for her." He seemed so anxious that Henry started talking.

"Oh, she's got three little boys that would like better a buffalo robe with the hair left on."

"Three nephews, eh? Say, how many relatives have you all together?"

"Now you ask me, I couldn't say without countin' up, and I've got one sister that's liable to have another one by now."

They laughed together as Henry named them off.

"There's Will, my bachelor brother—he can laugh longer and louder than any man you ever knew. He went to California but came home to fight on the side of the North.

George's next, he's got two boys, then Jim, he's married to a woman five years older that owned two hundred and sixty acres of good black dirt and not a cent against it, but I wouldn't have her for three times that much. Mariar, that married Ed, they have at least four, and Aurelia—Relly—that married Nate—she's the one who wrote, you know, that has three boys; and her husband's in South Carolina fightin' for Jeff Davis; then there's Thomp that was killed in action and his wife that died and left a little girl just a week old—"

All at once Henry realized that he could talk about it.

"Thomp and me fought like young bucks in season when we was kids. He had red hair and could hit like all hell was behind him."

"You're not so bad yourself." Lessups was ticking the family off on his hands; he didn't put down a finger for Thomp.

"I hope this little gal has red hair, and I aim to call her Sina."

"Nice name."

"Then there's me and Joycie. She's six years younger and not afraid of anythin' on four legs or two. You'd like Joycie." Henry looked up with his old shyness. "She must be quite a lady now, thirteen. I bet she's put her hair up, and maybe got a beau."

Henry suddenly remembered he'd been talking for one whole smoke. "But what about your folks?"

"I never had any. Out of all your twenty-two you ought to loan me some. I guess I'll take this hide and have it made up for little Joycie."

"But won't it be kind of growed up for her? Wouldn't

a plain beaver be better?" Hank looked quickly at Lessups to see if he had talked too soon.

"You're right. The best beaver in my pack is for little Joycie, and see that she learns my name. I get so damn near lonesome I think I'll take me a squaw and raise me some half-breed kids to liven up my old age."

He got up and went into the storage room. Henry suddenly remembered Hez. It was too bad Less couldn't be so free an' easy. Less was more like the Browns, quiet and thinkin' long.

"Less, why don't you move into Montreal and settle down and marry with a nice white girl?"

Less strolled in front of Henry. "Because I once thought of doing just that, and you know what her father wanted to know first?"

Henry wanted to shrivel up and crawl out between the logs.

"Who was Father, and I had to tell him I didn't know."

"Well, I'd-a told him to go to hell."

"Why? Because you've never known what it is to face shame—you *think* you would now, but just wait until sometime when you haven't your family for a background. Twenty-two people: all playing your accompaniment!"

Henry was sobered. "You'd probably say that the best thing a man can do is stick with his family."

Then even Less couldn't understand this thing that he had done, and yet Less had understood everything else.

"The preacher who brought me up wanted me to be a preacher. Church, church, church, and nobody to play with me. The boys thought I was queer and nobody liked me. Do you know why you've never known my first name?"

It's Ishmael! Abraham had an illegitimate son, if you remember your Bible."

Lessups was keeping his eyes on the stretching board as he talked. A strange color had swept into his face; it seemed it would make his pale eyes hot.

"When I was sixteen I ran away to get on my own. Cut off my nose to spite my face." He was bitter and harsh; then he changed to sarcastic humor: "But I probably saved a lot of innocent church people a lot of dull hours."

"And you ran out here to get away from it?"

"Sure, but I brought myself along."

Henry took out his pipe. "So did I."

They didn't go to Edmonton for Christmas, but held a celebration for all the Indians in the vicinity. Henry simply made himself be a gay fellow during the whole time. He conducted the contests and awarded the prizes. He'd not let Less see that he was homesick. It was so much better to have something to be homesick for, when you once thought of it, than to be scot free, with no ties to twist your heart into a curl of loneliness.

It was late March 1864 before they could get out. But the papers Henry found at Edmonton had been published in London back in 1863. The last one was dated June 4, 1863.

There was a great celebration going on in the post. Indians had gathered from miles around, all the voyageurs from four rivers, and most of the officers, yet Henry sat in the paper room at the post and read. It was the habit of the chief factor to read one paper a day, just one year late. He read every word, even the advertisements, so he had told Henry, but Henry could not do this. He did not have

time. He began taking papers from the bottom of the pile. Sweat stood out on Henry's white forehead; he clawed at his sandy beard like Pa when Jolas talked about old John Brown, but Henry did not remember old John Brown, he was too anxious to know what had happened to his nation.

The London papers didn't look like the old St Joseph or Sioux City papers. The advertisements were even different. They might as well have been printed in a different language. They were full of cotton prices and the terrible distress and hunger in the cotton manufacturing districts, all because the North was enforcing an embargo on the South. Famine in both England and the Confederacy. (And Henry's own sister didn't have paper to write to her brother.)

It made Henry burn that another nation dared criticize his own. He turned to other things. House of Lords talk and Queen Victoria still sad over the death of her consort and still wanting to abdicate in favor of her son. And then pages and pages about the marriage of the Prince of Wales to Alexandra of Denmark! The Queen Mother still in black.

What did *he* care about Victoria? She was a pudding-faced woman that looked enough like Mrs Lincoln to be her sister, just because they both parted their hair in the middle. President Lincoln had made a draft from twenty to forty! Henry read it three times! Twenty—he was only nineteen!

When Henry came out of the chief factor's private room he staggered as if he had been into the trading room.

The rum had been flowing outside as the regale had been given to all the voyageurs and their commanders, so that nobody paid any attention to Henry. "Twenty to forty!"

Lessups had come to find him. "Oh, there you are, Henry."

"Yes, I've decided to go home."

"No, you haven't, you can't do that. I've already told the chief factor that we aren't going to work for the company another year, but that we're going to work for ourselves in a little private trapping. These voyageurs say the Columbia Fur Company is paying real money."

"No, I'm goin' home."

"How much money do you think you'll have when you get there? Not even enough to buy yourself a substitute."

Henry turned a sudden red; his fists were clenched, his shoulders back. He had never mentioned to Less why he was in Canada.

"Take it easy, Henry, or you'll do something you'll regret." Lessups looked steadily at Henry from his wide-apart eyes. "Wouldn't it be nice to go back to the States with at least five hundred dollars?"

Money did talk down in Missouri—look what it had always done for the Brookings.

"Come on out and join the fun. There's horse racing and knife throwing and shooting at a mark." His eyes held Henry's; crinkles began to flow from the edges out to his thin cheeks. "And if you must, why don't you fight one of these voyageurs that's spoiling for a fight, as you say in your part of the country? You might as well win some of these prizes while you're at it."

That day Henry won more in prizes than his total yearly income from his work for the Hudson's Bay Company. He had to admit that the company was good to its men—generous with them, if they wanted to take advantage.

When summer came he did go with Lessups to the other side of the mountains down around Fort George to the Nechako River and Fraser Lake.

Henry found a protected valley high in the mountains where he could grow a garden, and here he managed to get Lessups to take a shallow root. To Henry it was the nearest thing to going home, raising a garden up here in the hills—ordinary vegetables like beans and turnips seemed to Henry of stronger, quicker growth than anything in Missouri, but the short season made it unfortunate for his attempt at sweet corn. Seeds were hard to get, and once the freeze came, the land was back to wilderness.

Henry dreaded the winter, the long cold waste of days with hours of working at the hides, curing and packing them for transportation; but this much he knew: the traps were quickly merciful, the extreme cold did the rest. He knew all this was better than getting Indians drunk in order to steal their furs. If he grew sick of scraping little pelts that Lessups brought in each day as he ran the traps, he reminded himself of the Indians going off from the "days of trade" with much less than what their furs were worth—shoddy blankets, floured vermilion, worthless trinkets and extravagant ammunition. The last of which they often turned upon each other in their drunkenness.

Henry lost consciousness of time; he lived only from season to season when the "ice went out" or "when the fish run," or when you could "cross the river without a boat."

It was August 1865 before Henry read another newspaper, and that one was six months old, but it carried the news that General Lee had given his sword to General

Grant (whoever he was) and Jeff Davis was in Federal prison.

So Henry was going home. He would have over five hundred dollars. He wouldn't try to take poor Sorghum with him, but would leave him with old McQueen as a sort of present. Henry felt guilty not going past to see McQueen, but Fort Garry was so out of the way when you had a chance to go to Lake Superior with a load of furs. Henry was to go free of charge if he'd look after the furs for Lessups and two other traders.

"I'm not afraid of you cheating me, Henry," one of the other traders said, "but you're about the only man in this outfit I'd trust with my furs."

Lessups laughed from the side of his narrow mouth. "And the funny part of it is, Henry's right smart, too. You'd think he'd learn after being here three years. I might surprise you sometime and come to see you, Henry. That is, if I don't end up living with a half-breed."

Henry knew then that the very word would always stir in his mind that picture of little Zitka, her knees in the snow. What if he had stayed and faced it out? He might never have gone home. Home!

He waved to the men at Fort Edmonton as he and his voyageurs pushed off with the fine load of furs. At least he would have something to take back with him to help out the family.

VII

HENRY'S SANDY BEARD made him look more nearly thirty than twenty-one. He came walking up to the door after dark. He had come on the train as far as St Joseph, and through the November damp and chill walked the rest of the way home in fourteen hours. He had walked right past Relly's corner without stopping because he was so anxious to see Ma. There would be Pa and little Hannah too—what a girl she'd be now, past ten years old and solemn-eyed yet, he hoped.

A light was in the kitchen. He summoned all his strength for a last hurry. He wanted to shout to bring his mother running to the door to laugh and cry over him the way she always did when one of her children came back after being away, but he made himself go up to the door before he shouted. His heart was pounding in his great chest; he'd been away from his own folks so long that he was as anxious as a little boy. He wanted to tear open the door and have all of them rush at him in welcome, but some restraint of lonely years held him back.

Pa came to the door, a stub of a candle in his hand, a look of fear on his face. How Pa had aged! His beard was almost white, and his hair was so thin his skull showed through.

"Pa!" Henry could not say any more than that, for the words were lodged in his throat.

But Pa looked hard into his face without recognition.

"Pa, it's Henry. Come home from Canada. All these whiskers keeps folks from reco'nizin' me."

"Henry Brown my boy died when he went to Canada," Pa said. His voice sounded as if it came from an empty room. "I don't have a son Henry no more."

"But Ma!" Henry wanted to push past his father into the warmth of the firelight, the smell of Ma's pipe.

"My wife was buried last week. My daughter Relly might take in a stranger to help with her work. Her man is down with malarie." He shut the door in Henry's face.

Henry stood facing the black wall, yet he saw inside as on the night Maria and Ed went to Kansas, the night when he had clung to the window, his feet on the milk kettle, to see into the room. The warmth, the light, the good talk, Jolas, and empty plates except for the turkey bones . . . and his desolation when he at last fell weeping against the wall was as nothing to this. That night his ma had come with a candle to stand between him and Pa. He had clung to her skirts that smelled of tobacco and wood smoke.

He suddenly knew that he had never been so alone in all Canada, for then he knew he was still a part of his ma's heart. Now he was alone for the rest of his life.

Henry started to work at Relly's.

Nate had been found in a prison camp, sick with malaria.

Now at last he was at home, but unable to leave his bed for days at a time. The other three Brown brothers were hard pressed for money, so Henry was glad he had his five hundred dollars. He grubstaked Will, his bachelor brother, an even hundred dollars to go West for gold again, though Henry knew if he wanted he could go for less.

The boys thought he came by his money in some miraculous easy way, and he wouldn't bother to tell them about the little frozen animals he'd skinned, careful not to cut the hide; the cold he had endured, often the near-starvation he had experienced.

He bought George a team so he could start farming right again and take his wife and children from his father-in-law's place. Jim was better fixed than any of the rest, for his wife, Vida Holtz, had managed her farm during the war with more success than almost any of the men. But Jim was burning up for a newfangled threshing machine, and Vida didn't want to invest the money. Jim still had his hundred from the war, so with all Henry could spare he bought the thresher.

Jim's wife was keeping Joycie with her since Ma had died, so Jim seemed to figure the family owed him something for that, though Henry felt Joycie should be home taking care of Pa. Pa had a hired man and his wife living in the house with him; it wasn't like having his family close, but Joycie couldn't see it that way. She was almost sixteen now and keeping company, and Vida had a nicer place for her to stay.

"Why doesn't he let Mariar and Ed move in with him if he's so lonesome without his family?" Joycie flared. She was wearing the beaver neckpiece Lessups had sent her;

its rich brown almost matched her hair. "What do you know about Pa anyhow, Henry? He's changed. The holy Mother herself couldn't live with him now since Ma's dead."

Henry wondered where Joycie ever learned such wicked talk, but he didn't ask her. He did try to explain Pa. "He's old, and you know he must miss Ma. Thirty-eight years together."

"Well, Henry Brown, you don't know how much I miss her." And Joycie put her hands over her face and wept. "Vida is the only person who understands, because she lost her ma when she was just my age."

Henry did not draw attention to the fine green wool dress she was wearing. Vida was also understanding about Joycie's love of finery. Poor Vida, too big and rawboned to look fine in anything, must be having a lot of pleasure dressing Jim's baby sister. Vida should have had a lot of children of her own, but here she was childless and spoiling Joycie, after Ma was out of the way.

"Never mind, Joycie, I guess Pa will make out all right." And Henry went on to Nate's field after assuring Joycie into smiles again.

He was doing the work of two slaves now with only the help of the colored boy. The two men had run away the first year of the war, but Bell and the boy would not leave Relly and the children even after the emancipation.

"We is still Miss Relly's, Mist' Henry. What'd she do with Ellery and Joe and little Dan widout me? Miss Relly needs us an' me an' Jonah needs her."

Henry was grateful for them. Without Jonah to fetch and carry he never could have managed, and Relly in the house alone was something Henry could never get used to.

Relly was bigger than Ma had ever been, but she had been used to folks taking care of her so long that she couldn't buckle in and do work and manage the way Ma had done. Henry couldn't let his thoughts turn to Ma yet; there was too keen an ache of bereavement. He would turn to work as Ma had turned to her soapmaking.

The place was so run down that Henry knew that if he were Nate he would be out of the house working on the fences each day. But not Nate! He was able to ride back and forth to town for a few supplies, but he always took to his bed the minute he had finished his trip or his meals.

One day Henry broke the point off his breaking plow and had to have it repaired at once. He hurried into the house and, not seeing Relly anywhere about, went to Nate's room.

"Oh, it's you." Nate did not raise his head from the pillow. "Is something important the matter?"

"Yes."

Henry wanted to yank Nate out of that bed. Here for five months he had been doing the work while Nate lay in bed and rested himself. Anybody who had ever had malaria knew you didn't get over it resting; you had to get up and go to work and wear it out. Hadn't that old doctor brought Hez Eagan over to bring him out of bed?

"Breakin' that west forty I nicked off the blade of this plow."

"Weren't you a bit hasty?"

"Listen here, Nate,"—Henry was suddenly so mad he couldn't hold his tongue another minute—"I'm workin' your land. I've managed to get most of your fences fixed, I've even curried your own horse when you come home

from town, and then I've gone on to do the milkin' so as I could bring milk in here for your children! When I break a plow I don't want you sayin', 'Weren't you a bit hasty?'"

Nate sat up in bed. His hair rumpled, his mustache not yet waxed, his thin hands clutching the covers about him, there was something so pitiful about him that Henry was sorry. Here was Nate who had always worn gloves when he drove, who never wore a boot unless it was shined so you could see yourself in it, who had clean shirts every day and wouldn't think of putting onto his fine thin foot a sock that had been worn before.

"You! Henry!" Nate's voice was one he must have used to command the slaves. "I thought this place was a haven to you in your disgrace. Aurelia and I were the ones who threw open our doors when your own father closed his against you."

"If I haven't paid fifteen times over for everythin' I've had at this house I'll eat the whole place!" Henry lost all his feeling of pity. "But I guess I ain't supposed to know what you'd call gratitude—never gettin' any of it in my day. But if you're able you'd better get out of that bed and take this plow point to be fixed. That is, if you're not firin' me for uppityness. Or maybe have me thrashed like the Northerners thought you did your slaves."

For a moment Nate tried to control his temper and then lay back weakly on the bed. His voice came with a quaver of contempt: "I won't fire my wife's own brother, but you can see that you are taking advantage of a sick man."

Henry spun round and strode from the room. The floors that once reflected polished boots and lace ruffles rang with his clatter of field shoes, but the floors were past the

point of injury to their polish; they were like the fences and everything else around this place.

Henry went back to the field, turned his horses out to pasture and caught up the colt that Nate had been riding. He was a dappled gray with big knees, but he was the best horse on the place.

Riding past the house, Henry asked if Relly wanted anything from town. She came out of the kitchen drying her hands on her apron just as Ma used to do. She was twenty-nine and looked much older. To Henry she was still beautiful and a lady. Her red-gold hair was not as bright as it had been when she could wash it every week in three fine eggs. Now she needed the eggs for the three little boys. Her hair still curled about her face. Poor Relly was using ordinary lye soap that Bell cooked off for almost everything except Nate's best shirts (Nate couldn't bear the smell).

"Yes, Henry, you might buy me a spool of white cotton, and if you can afford it, a set of red buttons for Danny's little suit I'm making out of my old riding habit."

She looked up at Henry; a smile curved her mouth. "He'd be so cute with red buttons all down the front of the little coat, or maybe brass, but of course they would be far too dear."

Henry knew that if there were brass buttons in town, little Danny should have them.

While the plow was at the blacksmith's shop, Henry walked on down to the main street. There were only a few loafers about, as it was such good farming weather. None of them seemed to recognize Henry, so he didn't bother to make himself known.

The town had changed very little—except for the new plate-glass window in Logan's store. Henry had heard that Quantrell's men went through town one midnight and shot it out because old man Logan, in charge of some home guards, was making it so hot for them. Others thought it was maybe one of the old man's tricks to get the place advertised.

Luella was at the candy counter when Henry went in. She had changed less than anyone he had seen; her big teeth still held her mouth agape. . . . Maybe you don't notice homely girls getting old so quick because they simply can't be any uglier. . . .

"Something for you?" Luella asked without her customary simper.

"Why, howdy, Luella, you haven't changed a bit." Henry was more than usually friendly.

"Sure enough." Luella didn't smile. "Maybe staying home to face what comes keeps some folks young."

Henry could hardly believe what he had heard. It was a year since the war was over, and after all what business was it of hers if he didn't go to fight?

He turned and left the store.

Delia had said he might marry Luella sometime. She was mistaken; even the ugly Luella wouldn't have him. He would have to ride seven miles farther if he aimed to get Relly's brass buttons, for Logan's store was the only one in town that might handle them. As he came out on the sidewalk he saw that a crowd had gathered around a rider on a fine black horse.

It wasn't out of his way to walk past. It might be some medicine show or even a fellow advertising a circus at

Liberty or Kansas City. The fellow wore a black beaver hat with a white band that matched the left hind foot of his horse. There was something familiar-looking about that package behind the saddle.

"Well, I'll be hornswaggled," old man Logan was saying, "I'd never have knowed you, Hez. Git off your horse and come in to see the old woman and Luella."

"You must-a struck it mighty rich out there!" somebody else said.

Henry wanted to wave and yell to Hez, but Luella's snub had taken the props out from under his nerve. Hez would find Luella mighty cool if he took old man Logan at his word, but it wouldn't hurt Hez. He was shaking hands all around and calling the men by their first names, men that Henry would always "Mister." Henry was trying to catch Hez's roving black eyes, just for an instant of recognition.

"Be damned if it ain't good to git home, but thanks, Jim Logan, I guess I'll be goin' on out to see how Widder Patch is."

A silence folded over the welcomers. Finally Mr Logan told Hez that the Widder had been dead over a year—pneumonia.

"I'll be damned!" Hez took off his fine beaver hat with a show of reverence. "An' I thought she'd be so proud to see me come ridin' back on a fine horse. Boys, she was my mother for eight long years. It's kind of a shock."

Henry wanted to laugh, but the crowd as a whole was completely moved. The way Hez had talked about the Widder, and then even taking her nag . . .

"I tell you, Hez, you just make my place your head-

quarters till you git settled," old man Logan offered with a tremble in his voice.

"That's mighty fine of you, Jim."

Just then Luella came out of the store and started towards the crowd. She had probably been looking out the window and couldn't stand her curiosity any longer.

"Howdy, Miss Luella." Hez bowed and then put his hat back on his luxurious curls. "But I guess I'd better be movin' on. I may take you up on that offer in a day or two, Jim."

Luella was simply beside herself in simpers.

"Hez!" At last Hank could wait no longer for recognition.

"Be dadburned if it ain't Hank Brown!" Hez leaned far over his horse's neck and gave Hank a crack across the back with his gloved hand. "Hidin' there behind them red whiskers, Hank, you old devil, I'd never a-knowned you!"

"You look mighty prosperous, Hez."

Hez looked Henry over and then reached out to tweek Henry's beard. "And you, Hank Brown, look like Jesus Christ."

The crowd that had backed off when Henry came up to the horse let out a great yell. Hez was a very devil of a joker; smart fellow, Hez, and rich, too.

As Henry rode home through the April sunshine he was reminded of the day when he and Delia had their first real quarrel. He had been riding Sorghum, and there was the same blue look to the sky—not that washed-out blue, but one of depths like some of the lakes in Minnesota. He wondered where Onjewonhee was and why he couldn't

remember exactly how he looked except when he smiled. . . . People forgot quick these days—that is, if there wasn't somebody goin' around remindin' them. Look at Hez. He rode off on a borrowed horse back in '62, and here he was, even old man Logan asking him to put up at his house. But of course the old man did have a marriageable daughter . . . and Hez looked mighty prosperous.

Maybe Delia had forgotten, too. She was tryin' to run that place of her father's alone, she needed a man, and God knew he needed a woman and a home of his own and a place where his work would count for somethin'. It would probably be the best thing that could happen to Nate if he walked off and left him all the work to do. . . .

It was May before Henry got courage to talk to Relly about Delia. "Surely she'd sooner marry me than someone who might have killed her first husband."

"I wouldn't be too sure, Henry."

"How can war make such a difference?" Henry clawed at his sandy beard with his freckled hand. That hand was large, but now he had grown to fit it.

"Not war, Henry, but not goin' to war!"

Henry felt the sting of Relly's words. Relly had been with him that Sunday when he tried to go to church. Nate had still claimed he was too weak to go, so Henry had taken Relly and the boys. When he had driven up to the hitch rack, Tom Brooking had come out and moved his team away from beside Henry's. There had been a wide space on either side of Henry's team.

Inside the church Henry had sat on a bench alone. Relly and the boys had sat with the women . . . but before

church took up, the women had moved to other pews. . . .

"It's like we've got smallpox, Henry. I can't see how you can think Delia's been vaccinated."

But Henry washed and dressed himself with care. A lot of time had passed since the day he tried to go to church. Hez Eagan, for one thing, had come back and was making a place for himself. He was looking for a farm to buy, some said. Right now he was making a shine towards Joycie. Henry didn't like that very much, but he thought Joycie would probably take care of herself. She and Hez were too much alike to get serious about marrying. Henry wasn't going to live the rest of his life with Nate and Relly. As their hired man he worked without pay and did the work of a couple of slaves besides managing the farm, yet Relly felt more kindly towards Jim and George than towards him. As for Maria and her brood, Hannah was the only one who would speak to him.

He needed a wife, and Delia was still the only woman for him.

Even with the things Henry had faced before, he was not prepared for Delia. He had a good excuse for going to see her; after all, she was keeping Thomp's little Sina, and he had a right to visit his own niece.

But Delia came to the door herself. Though she had no slave to do her work, her hands were still smooth and white, her soft red lips still turned down at the corners with the well-cared-for pout. She had come out of mourning and was wearing a pink flowered lawn without hoops. Henry was so happy at the sight of her that he couldn't think but that she would be as glad to see him.

"Hello, Delia. You're lookin' mighty pretty."

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"Hello, Delia. You're lookin' mighty pretty."

"Henry Brown, I've been insulted by bushwhackers, I've spit in the faces of Northern soldiers, I've lived on corn bread and molasses for so long that I wouldn't know what a piece of ham looked like, but I've never seen the day when a dirty, yellow-bellied deserter would have the nerve to come to my door and expect to court me. I'd marry to that ignorant, slobbering Bud Tadlock rather than marry to you!"

Henry never even had time or wit to tell her he had come to see his niece Sina before she slammed the door in his face. That was what he should have done—put her in her place when she was completely out of breath and couldn't say another word. But Henry's tongue was like a chunk of cold lead in his mouth.

He could not even tell Rely what Delia had said to him, though Rely found out soon enough. Delia liked a good story too well not to pass this one around, and it was soon all over the neighborhood. Henry went to work harder than ever before so as not to be around when people came by to pass the time of day or to swap gossip.

It was the middle of the second winter that Pa was paralyzed. The hired man and his wife who had been living with Pa sent word they needed help.

Rely managed to get a distant cousin, Mag Epper, whose husband had been killed in the war, to go over to Pa's to work. After the first week the hired man was called away because of illness in his own family, and that left the two women alone.

Jim and George felt they couldn't leave their farms, and Maria was waiting for the sixth child, so of course Ed

couldn't be spared; Relly was nursing Danny through the measles, and she certainly couldn't send Nate over there to take care of Pa. Henry seemed the logical one to send.

To Henry it seemed he was taking advantage of Pa, paralyzed and not able to speak his mind; but the arguments of the family and Henry's own desire to go back were stronger than his hesitations.

There was a heavy snow, so Henry had to walk around the road from Relly's, and he was so busy at the door kicking off his boots and pounding his hands for warmth that he couldn't pay much attention to his reception. But when he came into the kitchen he could smell, above the odor of medication and illness, tobacco smoke like Ma's. For a moment Henry had the feeling that his ma was back, or that she had never been away. He wanted to run shouting through the house for her, calling up the stairway, yelling towards the springhouse or pounding at her bedroom door.

"Take off your wraps and set to warm a spell."

Henry was startled. The voice had come from Pa's bedroom door, and it wasn't Ma's, but it was that of a young woman, and there was kindness in it. He turned to face a woman almost as tall as himself, with smooth light hair and big features, and she carried a clay pipe like Ma's in the curve of her hand.

"I'm Mag."

Her voice wasn't harsh or loud, but husky, quiet. You couldn't help being dumfounded that it came from this big body.

"I guess I ain't seen you since we was little shavers," she said as she went over to the fireplace and pulled up Pa's chair for Henry.

There were two great logs sending flames high up the chimney. . . . It would take a mighty big woman to roll them logs into place. But there had to be a big fire to warm Pa's room. Pa was not able to see the flames or to jump from bed to throw back a live piece that had popped out on the floor. Henry couldn't believe it. He wanted to ask about his pa, but he felt too strange in the kitchen, all at once so bare. Ma's loom was gone, and there wasn't a flower quilt in the frames drawn up out of the way. . . .

"Once you give me a little book carved out of a mussel shell," Mag said.

Henry was glad she broke the links of his thoughts. He remembered with quick discomfort the book and why he had given it to her.

"Yes, it's scarred." She put her pipe into the other hand and extended the crooked one. "But it don't bother. Your ma took such good care of it."

Mag had been an orphan. When she was eight or ten years old she'd been bound out to a woman who didn't feed her enough. Once, after Mag had taken some meat from the cupboard, the woman had burned her hand as punishment. It all came back to Henry now, how Ma had turned up one day with the scrawny little girl with a sore hand, and how everyone had felt sorry. Here was that same little girl as big as a skinned horse, and you still felt sorry for her.

"Hez Eagan carved out the mussel-shell book," Henry felt bound to confess, though he needn't say that Hez had given it to Joycie, who had traded it to him for a toad.

"I kept it till we got burned out when I was livin' with the Mabries."

Henry could ask about Pa now, for even that was easier than letting Mag bring back her past. He was afraid she'd start telling him how her young husband was killed in the same battle with Thomp and buried along with him at Lexington in a single trench.

"Your pa's not much changed," Mag told Henry in answer to his question. "His breathin' may be a mite easier."

She got up and went into Pa's room. Her walk went with her size, not her voice.

Henry rose and followed her. Nothing in there seemed changed; the bed was even in the same corner of the room, just as when Henry had the doctor for malaria. But Pa!

To look at Pa's decay made Henry feel guilty. His long frame stretched in the bed as immobile as a corpse, but he didn't have the release of the dead. Breath still whistled in his nostrils, blood still pulsed through his veins, but no thoughts or conscious actions moved the great size of him.

"It ain't right a man as active as Pa should have to be seen like that."

"No, but I guess they's plenty that will see him before his end comes." Mag stepped to the window and lowered the shade. "Ed said this mornin' that him and Mariar thought maybe they should locate that will of your pa's before you come over here."

"Ed said!" Henry wanted to smash into something with his fists. "Maybe if they feel that-a-way about me, I hadn't better stay to help."

"Just keep your shirt on now, Henry. I've done looked over the place, and there ain't no will here."

Henry wanted to whirl on her and tell her to tend to

her own business, but she was bending over Pa, changing the cold pack on his head.

"You might as well know it, I found some money in the Bible, and as far as I'm concerned you can keep it. All your family is hopin' your pa has cut you off with just a dollar."

Henry's voice was so brusque that it sounded to his own ears as if his want were to put Mag in her place: "Do you need any help before I go do the chores?"

Mag didn't give an inch or show by as much as a blush that she had been corrected. "You might help turn your pa. I can do it alone, but I think it's easier on him with two of us workin'. He ain't no heavier than them logs in the fireplace, just awkwarder to handle."

By the time Pa was breathing his last about two weeks later and the doctor had come at noon to stay to the end, even Relly was beginning to act suspicious of Henry. She had come over like the rest, as if to see Pa, and had wound up by rummaging through the place. At first Mag managed to hold her tongue, but the second time she came out of the death room and found Relly standing on a chair peering into the cups and bottles on the top shelf of the cupboard, she exploded:

"I wish you-all could find what you're lookin' for." She looked worn and older than the day Henry had come to help. "It'd be worth it to me to be able to lay a pin on a shelf and know it would be there when I come back."

Relly, always mistress of any situation, said: "You haven't seen a little glass horseshoe around here anywhere, have you? It was mine when I was a little girl, and I'd hate for it to be turned over to the Griffie outfit to be destroyed."

Just then Maria came in from the hall where she had probably been going through the closets. Henry thought it was lucky she hadn't caught Relly's slight to the Griffie children or there might have been the devil to pay, for Maria was certainly touchy in her condition. Henry hated to look at her; it reminded him of the year when she'd come back from Kansas.

"No," Mag said. Her eyes were red-rimmed from loss of sleep. "I ain't seen no glass horseshoe, nor no will, either. That goes for both of you. Here your pa is breathin' his last and all you 'uns are thinkin' of is that will and how much money you'll be gettin'."

"Is that so?" Maria heaved herself against the table and glared at Mag. "And I suppose all you're thinkin' of is, will you get Henry, or maybe you've already got him, and I wouldn't put it past you to of found that will and read it and burned it so Hank won't be cut off without a cent. That'd be kind of awkward if you did get him."

It was like bringing out into the open the dead cat that had been smelling under the house for a week.

Mag straightened and moved towards Maria. She looked twice as tall as Maria and even as tall as Relly still standing on the chair before the cupboard. "You bitch!"

Mag was back in Pa's room before Maria could get her breath, and Relly was down off the chair trying to get her sister to be calm. Henry felt he shouldn't be seeing this. Maria was yelling for Ed, who wasn't in the parlor with Nate after all, but had gone home to take a nap.

. . . So that's what the family had been thinkin' and sayin' all the time and poor Mag workin' harder than any nigger—gentler with Pa, though he didn't have conscious-

ness, than Mariar would ever be with one of her own babies.

The hired hand's wife had turned out to be a poor stick to lean on, but she had been able to take care of the meals and the chickens and milk, but everything else was done by Henry and Mag. None of the children had come in to sit up nights; they had only left orders to be called if Pa regained consciousness. Mag and Henry had spelled each other with Pa's care, day and night, hour by hour, and Maria in her condition had said what all the others were probably thinking.

Henry got his hat and went to the barn.

It was cold out there without his coat. He adjusted the blanket over the doctor's horse and soon decided he didn't need a coat because of his fury and the exertion of cleaning out the stalls. As he scraped and shoveled, he decided that he'd go back to Canada, where a man could be free of the cantankerousness of a family.

He'd have to go somewhere. He might as well go where he'd already got acquainted. He'd heard the Hudson's Bay Company had been put under a stricter rule—no more rum in trade.

The harder he worked the more he planned. And he'd thought he was lonesome for his folks! They hadn't even let him see little Hannah alone in these two years since he had come home. Why had he stayed here to get bemeaned? Why? He stopped for breath and looked around the barn.

The cribs of corn and oats, built snug to be mouse-tight, the high passageway between the stalls and cribs where wagons were unloaded and small grains were threshed . . . He'd bent his back under the flail until he could hardly straighten to walk to the house for dinner—wheat and oat

beards scratching inside his clothes—Pa bragging that he could beat the hired hand—Henry going back to work harder with the flail.

That was the trouble now, nobody had bragged on him once since he had come home—no praise, no special kindness—and yet he worked on because he didn't have the gumption to tell them all to go to hell and stay hot. He didn't have a cent to get away with, either, because he'd worked at Relly's without pay. What was he, anyhow—he was big as an ox and about as strong, and yet he'd let that whole family bulldoze him into slavery. Why, he hated the whole outfit of them! Well, maybe not Joycie, because she was too young to realize what the rest of them had done to him, and Hannar. They *might* just be a little sorry to see he was gone, and if what Mariar said was true—maybe Mag—but nobody else would mind. He'd let them have all their dirty money and land and to hell with them all! He didn't have to have any of the money—nary cent of that money—if they were goin' to accuse him and Mag of pilferin' that will. Let 'em divide up the land and money Pa had left—divide it amongst the six of them.

Six!

But there had been eight!

Little Sina, Thomp's girl! If Pap cut Henry off without a cent he'd sure cut Thomp off—Thomp left even before Henry, and Thomp's heir was helpless little Sina, stayin' with Delia.

What had he been thinkin' of? Goin' off from this place where he had as good right as ary Brown that ever lived and leavin' Sina cut off, too—why, he'd break that will if necessary. Yes, he would, he'd fight bein' cut off for Sina's sake.

And then he thought that maybe Pap had included Sina. No, he couldn't fight to break that will just for himself. He'd have to go back to Canada. Licked.

But his blood was up, he was still mad. He wasn't licked. He liked this farm, this barn, these horses, the three young colts that nickered from the straw stack in the lot.

All at once in one of those moments of clarity Henry knew why he had stayed. This was his home. Any other country or even state with its strange seasons would never be home to him; it was in his bones, this farming. He'd missed it more than any person except Ma. That summer he had a garden in the mountains he'd been more contented than any other time.

Nobody was going to drive him out of this country—it was his!

He hung up his shovel and strode towards the house. If he'd been cut off without a part, he'd hire himself out—yes, to Vida Holtz if necessary. He was going to stay. He would tell Maria and the rest what he thought of them, and he'd be like Mag—use the words that fitted them. Mag had a toughness in her bones that came from being crippled and knocked around. Well, he'd been knocked around, too! And he'd go in there and blow the roof off—Pap couldn't hear it, and he didn't care about anybody else.

But when he opened the door Relly almost yelled at him, "Oh, Hank, hurry quick and build a fire in that upstairs bedroom—Mariar's time has come, and she refuses to go home to have her baby."

As he went through the kitchen with the wood and cobs to start the fire, Mag came out of Pa's room and announced that their pa was dead.

Henry felt it really was too bad Maria and Pa couldn't have held off another thirty minutes, for he was afraid now he'd never again get wound up to tell the family off. . . . You had to be so powerful mad not to care how much you blistered other people.

There was a sort of veiled truce during the day of the funeral, but Henry knew it wasn't any safer than trying to walk on thin ice in the spring. Every now and then you'd hear a warning crack, like Ed's saying he felt Maria's delivery had been Providence—here she was back in her own home.

George's wife, Vinnie, who had halfway counted on George as the oldest boy getting the home place, said something about counting chickens when they were still in the eggs. Relly quickly asked Vida Holtz if her hens were laying well.

This, to Henry, was going mighty far. Anybody with half a wit knew Relly didn't care any more about eggs than a duck about Sunday, but he felt glad she was there to ease things up when they got too tight, especially after the funeral when the whole family, except the children and Maria, had gathered in the big kitchen to eat their supper. Mag and the hired man's wife had stretched the table full length and had set on it all the food that the neighbors had brought in.

Ed took Pa's place at the head of the table, Henry supposed, because he was the husband of the oldest. George and his wife, Vinnie—she as scrawny as a laying hen—were next; then Jim and Vida Holtz, with Joycie sitting in Ma's place and Relly, Nate and Henry on the other side. Mag

had refused to sit at the table, though there was room for her beside Henry. If Mag hadn't been so big she couldn't have shed so much fury towards everybody but Henry as she got around that kitchen. Now that her work for Pa was over and she had her traps packed to leave tomorrow, she didn't have to be beholden to any of the Browns and showed it. Henry appreciated that fact that she didn't sit at the table, though he was ashamed of himself for his thoughts.

Joycie had just laid down her third cleaned chicken bone and burst out crying. "But the rest of you have *homes* of your own! I'm all alone—*now!*"

And Vida Holtz had jumped up from the table and come around to lead Joycie over to Ma's rocker when there came a knock at the door.

Even Joycie stopped crying to look up. Who *ever* heard of company right after a funeral, unless it was the preacher! But the man who entered was no preacher.

Mills was a man of thirty or so, with fine white teeth and a bristling black mustache, and he wore on occasions a medal he had received for bravery in the army of the North, but none of these accouterments was accountable for the sudden, almost electric tension that sprang from person to person when he entered.

Vernon Mills was a lawyer.

George, being the oldest present, offered him a chair at the table, though it was Relly who asked him if he wouldn't eat with them. Mr Mills declined both offers, though he was extremely gracious about doing it.

"I thought this would be my best chance to find you together," Vernon Mills said. Ed didn't hesitate to give Mag a triumphant stare. Everyone was at once through eating

anyway, so, as if Joycie had set the pace, they left the table. Henry was ashamed of their haste. He thought he saw a look of craftiness in George's wife's face as she viewed the still-loaded table, for Hannah was keeping the children over at her place, and there wouldn't really be any need to cook any more, now that out of excitement rather than politeness the grown ones had to stop eating.

The men got up and moved their chairs around the fireplace. Mag, with the help of the hired man's wife and Vinnie, started clearing the dishes, Joycie kept her seat in Ma's rocker, and Vida Holtz and Relly managed to find chairs without confusion. If they had all shouted, "Tell us quick what you know about Pa's will," their eagerness could not have been plainer. Vida and Relly were the only two who managed to cover up their tarnal hurry. Their way of doing it couldn't have been more different, Henry thought. Vida, big and rawboned and Swedish, with her colorless hair, sat and didn't move a muscle, while Relly, as neat and trim as a dove and with the same proud way of turning her head so that the light caught her hair, busied herself with everyone's comfort.

"It was your father's wish that I be the attorney for the estate," Lawyer Mills said, once they were all seated. "I have his signature here on some papers empowering me to act as his legal adviser in the disposal of his land to a railroad which has considered crossing this place." He paused and stroked his dark mustache with dignity. "At present the road is at a standstill, but I believe it would be your father's wish that I be retained."

Henry thought the fellow had a lot of crust to come out here when the handles of Pa's coffin hadn't yet got cold,

but he didn't say anything; he knew he couldn't. This man would be the one to say whether Henry had been cut off by Pa, and he would certainly clear him with the rest of the family. Why wasn't he feeling proud and ready to say "I told you so" instead of experiencing this tight squeezing in his chest?

"What railroad is it?" Ed asked with authority.

Henry could see Jim bristle; even plump, peace-loving George straightened in his chair and put down the cigar he'd started to light. If Ed had interrupted to ask, "But the will?" they could have forgiven him, because they all wanted to ask it so much.

"The Burlington."

"Oh!" Ed laughed. "Never mind about that. Hit probably won't ever come through. What's your proposition?"

Ed still wore his black beard, and no matter how poor or dirty his clothes, his beard was always combed and oiled.

Relly began to squirm in her chair. She looked at Nate as if to prod him to action. Everyone knew Ed was a nobody . . . but Nate now!

Nate calmly lighted one of the cigars from the box on the mantel. Jim had brought them out for the ones who sat up with Pa when he lay a corpse. Henry could see that Nate's nails weren't as fine as they had once been. He hoped Nate was learning to milk.

"After all, I have no proposition! I merely have the law to lay before you." Vernon Mills looked down his nose with a show of humbleness you knew he didn't feel. "Do you want to retain me as a lawyer? Or shall I present my fee for the work that I have already done for the late lamented Mr Brown?"

Henry suddenly wanted to laugh at Mills. It had been so long since he had really laughed. He was seeing his family as a stranger might see them. The way they had treated him had made him less loving in his observations. They sat there simply on fire with the desire to hurry the proceedings, and yet none but Ed would risk sticking out his neck. And even he hadn't been able to ask the most important question.

"What have you done?" Henry heard himself asking, and then he had to swallow. "Did you write Pap's will?"

All of them turned towards Henry, and you could have counted the ticks of George's big silver watch through the silence.

"No, I'm sorry to say, your father thought he would live forever."

Vida Holtz didn't turn a hair, but Relly and Joycie nearly bobbed their curls off in their quick look from Henry to Mag, who dropped a dish that shattered the silence.

"Air ye positive?" Ed sprang from his chair.

"Quite."

"If there ain't a will, then we don't need a lawyer, do we?" Henry asked unsteadily.

They all turned to Henry again. He stood by the fireplace, his arm on the mantel, in reality to support himself, he was so weak in the knees.

Joycie's china-blue eyes glared at him. "No lawyer!"

Henry believed the little monkey had her cap set on Mills.

"How much does Pap owe you for what legal work you've already done?" Henry felt he had waited long

enough. They had had a chance to talk if they wanted to. "This land's all clear, and I happen to know Pap has some cash on hand. Me and Mag found it in the Bible."

Vernon Mills became arbitrary at once. "After all, it's quite unusual."

"We're all of age but Joycie there, and she's capable of picking her guardian from amongst us. It will sure save a lot of money if we do it ourselves, folks."

"I think he's right," Vida Holtz said in a loud voice that startled even herself. In her own name she more than likely had as much as Pap's whole estate. Jim looked at her and frowned, but she was undisturbed. "Just set down and divide it up like a cake or a pie. You don't need a lawyer."

George got up heavily and came across to the fireplace to shake the long ash from his cigar. He was as handsome a man as Mills, but he was putting on too much weight. "How much is your fee?"

"Five hundred dollars."

Nobody gasped out loud.

"How long have you handled the business?" Henry knew that fee was like a voyageur's first price for his work. "And what have you done?"

"I have kept the railroad from cutting straight through your father's farm."

Henry knew the man was bluffing.

"Which way was it coming?" Vida asked.

"In the southeast corner, going out the northwest."

"Queer they didn't mention crossing my land or Abel Holstrom's."

"You're right, it is queer, mighty damned queer," Ed chimed in with a coarse laugh. "How many shares in that

railroad company did you expect to buy with Mr Brown's money?"

Ed's sudden rudeness changed everyone to Vernon Mills's side. Henry didn't know where to go from there. Why get mad and sarcastic?

Then Nate quietly and deliberately walked to the mantel, took the box of cigars and passed them to the lawyer. If he had said aloud, "Never mind, Mr Mills, Ed Griffie isn't to be accounted for," it wouldn't have been plainer to Henry.

"I feel sure my wife's brothers and sisters are willing to do what is just, but I'm afraid they will be quite unwilling to pay five hundred dollars. They are also unwilling to retain you as a lawyer without further talk among themselves. My late father-in-law has some very fine colts. Joycie, will you go show them to Mr Mills? Besides, there is one child dead who left an heir, and one heir who is in the West. We will call you in a day or two, to let you know what we have decided."

Henry wondered why he hadn't thought of something as smooth as that. Nate did have a way with him. That came of ease and not having to grub for what you got . . . and education!

When Nate talked to Delia, she absolutely refused to permit a division of property without a lawyer there to represent little Sina.

That settled it. Lawyer Mills was invited out on the following week.

This time they met in Ma's stiff parlor, where nobody felt at home except Relly, who had entertained Nate there before she was married to him. Everyone was as dressed up

as for the funeral and sat around solemnly waiting for Delia.

There had been a thaw, and the weather was open again, but there was need for a fine bright fire in the fireplace.

Delia at last came driving a worn-looking bay horse that looked as if it were more accustomed to field work than to social calls, but Delia climbed out of that buggy as if she were dismounting from the finest rig in the Union. Her head was high in a violet-colored hat with green silk strings. She wore a dress that matched with plaited green ribbon doodads on the skirt that covered the seams so smartly that you had to look close to see that the material had been turned.

"And this," said Vernon Mills to Henry from behind the parlor curtains, "*must* be little Sina's aunt, for I'm sure I never saw her here before."

"Yes," Henry did not add, "and once she was promised to me." He didn't see how he could introduce Delia to Mr Mills, and yet the others were all occupied with this and that. Henry opened the hall door for Delia, and she came walking past him like a queen.

"Ah—Mr Mills?"

Henry wanted to shake her and tell her to climb down from her stage-acting, but he merely stood like an awkward country boy and got hotter until his collar choked him and he was grateful again for his beard. Delia was, if anything, more beautiful. Her hair left black shadows on her smooth white neck, and he felt such a tightness in his throat that he had to leave the room.

When he came back with an armload of wood for the fire, as if there weren't already twice as much as they would need, everyone was waiting for him, except Joycie.

"But she said she would come with you, Relly," Vida said. Her broad face suddenly showed pale around her mouth. "She was there all night, wasn't she?"

"Of course not. I didn't even know she was expecting to come." Relly looked worried. "Henry, you didn't see Joycie, did you?"

"Joycie?" Henry dropped the wood with a great clatter and brushed the bark from his coat. "Oh, she's always late, she likes to come in last."

"But you don't understand!"

Just then they heard two horses canter up the lane.

"There she is now," Relly said rather weakly.

But Vida jumped from her chair and went to a window to pull back the curtain without even bothering to look through the lace. "Jim, it's Hez Eagan with her."

Nobody but Vida seemed to realize the significance of the situation until Hez and Joycie came in hand in hand. Joycie, a little breathless and with a high color, and Hez as bold as you please, stood there for one moment, before Joycie said:

"We got married last night, so you won't need to appoint a guardeen."

The silence was so thick you could have "scum it with a cream ladle" as Mag said later.

Not one of them seemed able to get the use of his tongue until Delia held out her hands to Joycie. "You sweet, lovely child, so impulsive and dear, come and let me kiss you."

Joycie ran to kneel in front of Delia, who patted her shoulder with one hand and held out the other to Hez. "And congratulations to you, Hez Eagan. From the looks of the solemn faces around here, you've got a prize today

that none of them wanted to give up. Come on, folks, and welcome home the happy pair."

Great tears were rolling down Vida's cheeks.

Henry wanted to grab Joycie by the hair and pull her up to think. Vida loved her like a real sister, and here she was slobbering all over Delia, who would get many a good day's gossip from this little scene. Damn women, anyhow! What business had *Delia* welcoming somebody into his family? Women didn't know what honesty meant. He was glad for this moment that let him hate Delia Brooking, hate her as he had once hated Hez, and now Hez was a member of the family and fresh as new-cooked soap as Pa used to say. Henry went over and shook Hez's hand.

"I shore never guessed that first night I come here a little homeless devil that I'd ever be a real part of the family." Hez beamed at Henry.

"You started it, Hank, when you give me that money pouch Joycie'd give to you. Remember?"

Hank wanted to shout, "That's a lie, Hez Eagan, and you know it. You'd never dared to do this with Pa alive . . . but now Joycie comin' into money is different."

Lawyer Vernon Mills cleared his throat and asked for the attention of the heirs.

When Ed and Maria moved into the big house (she got the first choice, being the oldest), Joycie and Hez moved into the little one. People in the neighborhood couldn't get over the fact that Hez, with all the money he must have made out West in the gold fields, would be willing to settle down on a farm to work.

Henry had surprised the family by offering to take the

woods pasture as part of his sixty, and he surprised them more by signing over almost every cent he got and putting a mortgage on his land to buy out Will. He had a little house of one room built to live in and started farming for himself. Ed and Hez could exchange work and take as many days off a week as they had a mind to, but Henry was at it week in and week out. The only person he ever really talked to was little Hannah, now almost twelve.

"When I get a house of my own, I'm goin' to keep it the way Grandma Brown kept hers, or the way you keep yours, Uncle Henry," she told him.

It pleased Henry that this child could remember his mother.

"I thought when we moved into the big house," continued Hannah, "that we'd have things nice. I thought the reason we always looked such a mess was because we was crowded, but that ain't it. Ma just don't know how to keep things movin'."

"Hannar!"

"I know I ortn't to take sides against her. But if you had to try to keep things cleaned up you'd know."

Henry went on wrapping persimmons to store for winter.

"Ma'd never think of fixin' up for a rainy day, like you do. She'd turn us kids loose on them persimmons, and what was left we could give to the hogs." Hannah was tall and gangly for her age, but she gave promise of being as pretty as Relly someday. "You are queer, ain't you? But I like you that-a-way."

Henry went on with his wrapping.

"Did you learn to save things in Canada?"

"Maybe."

"Was the Indians savin'?"

"Sometimes."

"Tell me somethin' about them."

It was always the same. Henry thought of little things he'd have to tell Hannah as he plowed his fields: about the time the Indian chief dug up his buried enemy and stole his fine clothes to wear for himself, about the tall silk hats the big chief wore, about Onjewonhee and the red-handled knife. Today he talked to her about the war with the Indians.

"You're on their side, I believe, Uncle Henry."

"Yes."

"But Pap says the Indians ort to be killed off like hawks and varmints."

"I guess him and me don't think alike."

"But ain't them massacres awful out in Montana?"

"Yes, but you're safe from them here where you belong."

"Will you ever go back to Canada?"

"I reckon not."

"I wish you would."

"Why?"

"Do you like me as well as you do Joycie?"

"Better, if you won't tell."

"But you didn't ever send me a warm little fur to wear on my neck."

Henry turned from his work. "Hannar, did you like that fur piece?"

"More than anything else."

Why hadn't he, though? Hannah was like those little minks, quick and bright-eyed and silent, yet as easy to hurt.

That night he sent off thirty dollars for a fur piece for Hannah.

Always when she came she had to hurry back and he'd give her something as if she'd just been in the woods so her pap wouldn't lick the tar out of her for coming down.

One time in the fall of '68 she told Henry: "Pap says, come spring, we're goin' to move to Montana if he can sell this place for anythin' near what it's worth. He'd take up a claim that was some size. He don't like livin' so close against somebody."

Henry almost gnashed his teeth. He knew Ed talked against him at every chance, but Hannah was the only one who wouldn't listen. . . . If Ed uprooted Mariar again, he'd ort to be killed. Ed should of got killed in the war, like a hero, so he couldn't spoil any more years of Mariar's life and six children! Already she had lost most of her teeth.

Next spring, in '69, Henry mortgaged everything he owned to buy Ed's place. He'd have done anything in his power to keep little Hannah with him, but he knew Maria needed her help and that Ed would shoot anybody who would suggest such a thing.

This time Henry did not watch Maria pack. He went on plowing up to the time they were to leave, and then rushed over.

Ed suddenly remembered he'd left the extra horse collar at the barn, and tore off after it so that he wouldn't have to shake Henry's hand in farewell. But Maria kissed Henry with real affection.

"Don't go on the rest of your life bein' queer, Hank. Get married and raise a family of your own. There's noth-

in' like a family to take the kinks out of a man's brain."

Henry didn't think, to look at her with her sixth child on her hip, that she was a very good example of what a family could do for you, but he patted her on the back and sneaked a dollar into her hand. Money was hard to get hold of, but Henry was succeeding.

"Please, Mariar, don't pack up and move from one place to the other."

"Oh, I guess I'll do just as Ed says." There was the old light in her eyes. "We've got along all right for fourteen years. I guess we can manage the rest of the way. Come on, children, kiss your uncle Henry good-by before your pappy gets back."

Henry endured the wet kisses of the younger ones and ached over Hannah's tears. She sat in the back of the wagon holding the next-to-the-youngest, the fur piece he had given her tight about her throat. Ed hadn't wanted her to have it. He even threatened to throw it on the fire, but Maria had told him it would keep Hannah from getting the diphtheria and Ed had relented.

"I'd not really mind leavin' if we could take you with us, Uncle Henry. I still like you better than anybody in the world," she whispered in his ear. "Someday I'm comin' back to keep house for you proper, and I'll be smart and you'll be proud of me."

She kissed him again for the dollar he gave her. The twins were glad for their fifty-cent pieces. Henry was not losing the responsibility of this family; years later he would be called upon to bury the ungrateful Ed. And as for Hannah returning, she did not come back to see her uncle until she was past forty and her auburn hair had turned brindled gray.

Henry watched them around the corner and then worked in his field until so late that he could not see the empty home place as he went to his ranch house after the chores.

Hez walked over before Henry had gone to bed to bring him word that Delia and Lawyer Mills had just got married and that little Sina had been sent out to Relly's for a visit.

Henry knew now why he had been suspicious of Vernon Mills. Could Delia have had him in mind when she refused to divide the place without a lawyer? Just like her. He tried to make himself think he believed he was glad to be rid of Delia for good and all, but he knew in his heart that he was breaking out in jealousy.

"I took Joycie over to Vida's this morning," Hez said, as he tried to change the subject. He could see that Hank was mortally uncomfortable about Delia. "Joycie got to feelin' that maybe her time was comin' sooner than she expected. It's lonesomer'n hell in high water on that hill with Ed's folks gone."

"Yes, I suppose it is."

Hank's candles always sputtered because Hank made them himself and the wicking wasn't as good as it ought to be. Hank kept snuffing the candle so that the room seemed perpetually light and dark. It made the lines of Hank's face stand out; he was only twenty-four, but he looked ageless and aged to Hez.

"I'll be goldarned if I wouldn't shave off them whiskers if I was you, Hank. They make you look too damned sanctimonious."

"I'd probably freeze to death if I did." Hank tried to laugh. "Got used to them in Canada."

"How was Canada?"

"So-so."

"That's the way it was with Bitter Root. But I combed every boulder in that river."

"And you found somethin'."

"Not so much."

"What do you mean, Hez?"

"Aw, I'm about broke. You couldn't loan me fifty till time to sell my oats, come summer?"

"Will you be needin' that much?"

"There'll be the doctor to pay."

"Sure, I know, but couldn't you make twenty-five do? Your credit's good, ain't it? And Joycie's eggs and butter just about keep you in store victuals, don't they?"

"Yeh, but, hell, a man has got to have some money in his pockets, Hank. You'd think I was askin' you to *give* it to me."

"No, I wouldn't think that." He didn't tell Hez he ought to learn to live what he really was, a regular farmer that had flush times and poor times and had to live accordingly. He gave Hez twenty-five dollars and told him if he could stretch it till hay or oats time, he'd better. Somehow, from that first day when Henry had seen Hez on the black horse, he had known it was a bluff.

Joycie's baby girl was only four weeks old when somebody told her Hez was shining up to some woman down on Crooked River. Joycie didn't go whining to Henry or Jim. She just left her baby with Vida one night and took Pa's old revolver and went after that woman. She didn't need to shoot her; just the sight of that gun in Joycie's neat little hands was enough to scare her out of the country.

Hez stopped playing at parties until the baby was weaned, and then Joycie went along with him, riding behind the saddle if the roads were bad or the trip too long for a buggy. Hank was mighty proud to learn that Hez was doing the milking too, now, and didn't argue when Hez asked to borrow the other twenty-five dollars.

Joycie didn't even ask Henry to let them move into the big house, though she didn't think, as almost everybody else in the family did, that he would marry Mag and move up there now that Delia was married to the lawyer. Joycie was too busy keeping up with Hez to want more house to keep.

Henry did have Mag come to clean up the house and put everything back as nearly as she could remember the way Ma had it. When Henry heard the rumor that he was going to marry Mag, he gave her the money to go on a long visit to Tennessee with her husband's folks. It was kind of pitiful when he told her good-by.

"You'd be happier in the big house," she said to Henry. "You'd ort to let me keep house for you. I wouldn't care what folks said about me—I never did, I jist give 'em back as good as they send."

Henry got red. Mag couldn't know that years ago he'd decided never to get mixed up with another woman unless he wanted in the worst way to marry her.

"It ain't that, Mag, but I can work harder and later when I know there ain't nobody waitin' meals on me."

VIII

HENRY WAS ALMOST TWENTY-EIGHT before he started courting a girl again. If it hadn't been for the Rock Island Railroad he probably never would have met her. The railroad missed the old town by six miles, and Henry sold a right of way through the two sixties that he had bought from Ed and Will. With the profit he paid off the last mortgage and owned one hundred and eighty acres clear. The fine part about it was that the new town the railroad laid out was less than a mile from Henry's woods pasture. (Though Henry still kept away from crowds, it was convenient to have a place so close when he broke a plow or sickle.) They named the town Clayburgh, and set off four blocks for a park and one for a schoolyard.

This girl he started courting had come with her Sunday-school class to pick flowers in Henry's woods. People had neglected to tell her that he had a yellow streak down his back so wide that it showed through his clothes.

Henry came upon her sitting beside his spring, telling the children how to find the preacher washing his feet in a violet. Quite solemnly Henry showed the children how to get a drink from the spring without riling the water.

He should have gone on about his work. These children and their teacher hadn't come out here to talk to him, and yet he couldn't drag himself away or his eyes from the face of this girl. She couldn't be over eighteen, and yet she had the most straightforward look he had ever seen on a young woman; she never once looked out of the corners of her eyes. It was as if she didn't know she was so pretty a man had to stand and stare. Her eyes were almost as brown as Zitka's, but that was as far as any resemblance went. This girl's eyes let you know she'd take care of herself, but maybe lean to the kindness side a little. When she talked she didn't toss her curls. As a matter of fact she didn't have any curls. Her hair was smoothed back from her face, and once, when the sun glinted through the trees, Henry thought suddenly that her hair was as shiny as a horse's neck.

She probably thought him too old to flirt with, or maybe girls were changing. He could easily imagine her with a clean baby in her arms.

"Have I a blob of dandelion yellow on my nose?" she asked.

When he shook his head, she laughed so that her mouth made Henry want to stoop and kiss her.

"No, no, I'm sorry—you—you just look so nice here in my woods with all these little shavers racketin' around that I—" Henry's face turned so hot he knew he must look like a gobbler's neck—"I'd be proud if you'd come often to my woods."

"Oh, thank you, Mr Brown. I'm sure we will."

"Not if my father knows beforehand where I'm headed," one of the Griffie boys said.

Henry had a moment of sickening pain. It was as sharp again as when he first came back from Canada: Luella, the day at the church, Delia.

But the girl did not seem to hear Ed Griffie's nephew. "Come, children, shake hands with Mr Brown and thank him for a lovely afternoon."

Once again Henry felt the warm hands of children in his own. Even the little Griffie boy didn't have the brass to go on with his story.

When they were gone, Henry remembered he didn't even know her name. What if he had lost her? Suppose she never came back again? She had a voice as nice as Ma's, and that hair of hers was even prettier than Relly's; her eyes were as gentle as little Hannah's. He couldn't let her go.

But what if she was married? Henry thought that if she was already tied to a husband he would simply sell his place to the highest bidder and go off out West where Will was digging gold. Life wouldn't be worth this struggle, the insults, the constant grind of work, just to lay up some money for himself so that people would respect him for what he had and forget what he had been.

"God, don't let her be married to someone else, she's the only thing I want. I'll even forgive Ed Griffie and Hez Eagan for bein' such fools and liars and such poor mates for Mariar and Joycie, even Vernon Mills for marryin' Delia, and Delia for makin' little Sina think I am some kind of a varmint."

And then he realized he had been praying. He went to

the house and put on his best clothes and discovered that they were out of style and in need of pressing. He told the hired man that he was going to Kansas City in the morning to see about some stock. But he knew he had more cattle now than the corn would fatten, and enough hogs to follow them.

Once in the city, he went to the barbershop with the brightest windows and had the barber give him a shampoo and haircut and a fine trim to his beard. The barber suggested that maybe he should have it shaved completely off, but Henry knew he'd need that beard in case she'd already heard about him. He knew he was taking a mighty gamble, but he didn't care this once.

When he got off the train that night, he wore a suit of fine brown wool and carried in his hand a hat to match. He went into the hotel and ordered a supper before he got his horse to ride out home. That was the first time he'd been inside the hotel. The proprietor was courteous and showed him to a chair as if he were a traveling man.

"It's the clothes," Henry told himself, but later remembered that the proprietor was new in town.

Henry had to talk to someone, and then, as if it were intended, a little girl skipped through the room. "Hello, Mr Brown."

She was the proprietor's little girl, and she had been in the woods that day. Henry thought that nobody but a child would ever have remembered him, and blessed all children with their sharp eyes and wits.

"I'd like to come to your woods again. I laid on my stomach in the back yard and could drink out of a pan without shaking the grass I'd put in the bottom."

Henry Brown gave a big laugh, before he remembered that he hadn't laughed in public for years. The father of the child was interested in the talk of Henry's woods, and questioned her about the teacher who had taken her class out there.

Quite naturally the conversation came about so that Henry could learn that the girl he was seeking was Miss Charlotte Clemmer, the preacher's second daughter, and God was good: she wasn't married.

Henry did not wait to change his mind with taking thought, but paid for his meal and went right around to visit the preacher's house. He would have asked Charlotte that first night, for he was sure of his own mind, but he figured he'd better give himself a chance to make her want to be with him.

Before a month was out, and May apples were scenting the woods, Henry asked her to marry him. He couldn't do it without telling her everything so as to be fair to her.

"How could you think I didn't know?" Charlotte laughed right in his face. "I hadn't been home ten minutes that first afternoon when the Griffie family, Ma and Pa, came over and told my father the whole story."

"It must have been awful from them." Henry didn't know just how he would take it, but he had to know: "What did your father say?"

"He quoted Scripture about picking the beam out of your own eye. Father already knew about the years you took care of your Griffie brother-in-law's family while he went bravely off to war."

When Charlotte laughed you had to join in with her.

"I think, Henry Brown, that you're the most unappreciated person I've ever known."

It was nice, the way a woman could help you out when you tried to ask her if she'd marry with you.

That night the brambles through the woods were threaded with Henry's sandy beard, for he walked until daylight, too happy to be still within four walls. He came out at last beside the squirrel rock only to find fresh mushrooms thrusting to the day—"A sign from God that He is pleased," Henry told himself as he picked them and put them in his hat to carry back for his own breakfast.

He'd start that very day to get the big house fixed up for a new woman to sit beside the fire—a woman Ma'd have been proud to call daughter. It was such a shame Ma couldn't know Charlotte after all her other daughters-in-law: Vinnie, from Crooked River, and not quite as fine as Ma; Vida Holtz, too big and plain and not the mother of one grandchild in all these years; and poor little Sara who made Thomp fight for the South.

But Charlotte, now!

It didn't seem in reason that a woman could be as good as Charlotte and still beautiful. He wondered how he had ever clung to hope for Delia all these years when he knew all the time that she "hadna kindness" as old McQueen had called the thing most needed in a wife.

Henry and Charlotte's first child was six months old before Charlotte could persuade Henry to go to church.

"They don't want me in church," Henry said, as always.

"It spoils their special kind of religion when I come in. They can't forgive me. . . ."

"You're so good, Henry. You do every other thing that I ask of you. You have ten times my patience with that awful Ed, and Joycie's husband always wanting you to get them out of some scrape or other."

"But I made a bargain with the Lord about them," Henry told her.

"Oh, Henry, please be serious. If you go just this once and people aren't nice to you, then I will give up. But if you could only realize that people don't remember half as long as you."

Henry was slow with his chores, so that they had to go into church late. He couldn't bear for Charlotte to go through what Relly had for his sake. But Charlotte, in her wedding bonnet that still wasn't two years old, held her head so high and her smile so free that a person couldn't have slighted her if he had wanted to. She was young and had young friends, and her father was the preacher, and her three sisters were there with their friends.

After the sermon five men who weren't in any way related to Charlotte shook hands with Henry. That day at noon Henry suggested they ought to say grace before their meals, and he thought it was the man's place to say it. As Charlotte bowed her head, she could not see her plate.

Years go fast for those who are busy and content. But for the two boys on the hearthrug and the little girl Harriet in his arms, Henry could not have believed there had been so many as eight years shared with Charlotte.

From the first he had known that this moment would

come, and that it would be as much as he could bear, but he had not realized that it could chill him, even to the warmth of Baby Harriet in his arms, blind him to the serenity of Charlotte's face across the hearth, deafen him to the crackle of flames up the chimney.

"But what *is* a yellow-bellied coward?" Steve, the oldest, repeated his question.

Baby Harriet turned in Henry's arms to look into his face—expectant, wide awake, though he had thought her almost asleep at the last counting of her toes.

Steve came to lean on the arm of Henry's rocker.

It was Charlotte who spoke. "What a question to ask, Stevie! It must be some kind of a strange bird, like a yellow-bellied woodpecker or a red-winged blackbird or maybe a red-tailed hawk."

By then Henry had gained control of his breathing.

"No, that ain't it," Steve said, "it's . . ."

Now, Henry told himself, it would come, the rest of it, as he had always known it would. Charlotte couldn't talk it down with all her gaiety, or he couldn't wait it out with all his silence. Steve had started to school, and he had heard the other boys talk about their fathers who had fought, their uncles and cousins who had died, in the war. If it were for himself alone, Henry could bear it, but for Charlotte and these children to have to share his humiliation was too much.

Henry rose from his chair so fast that Baby Harriet threw her arms about his neck.

"It's somethin' human," Steve said, "and awfuller than white-livered."

Charlotte laughed. Even Henry could not have told that her laugh was forced, had he not known her feelings. There

wasn't any use to beat around the bush about this thing, you might as well face it. But to try to explain to a little boy with a tooth gap in his lower jaw was really more than Henry could encompass.

"I've heard of red men," Charlotte was saying, "and so have you in your father's stories about Canada, and buffalo bladders filled with fat and buffalo skins filled with pemmican. Oh, Henry, do tell us the story of Lessups and the Indian."

"Yes, do!" David, the other boy on the hearthrug, shouted.

"Do!" Baby Harriet echoed, her mouth as round as a wild plum.

Steve did not join with the others, but went to sit on the hearthstone with his arms about his knees.

Henry cleared his throat. It might be just as well; maybe in another day the boys at school would find someone else to torment.

"Lessups was my boss, and he had a chin like this, only without a beard," Henry began by measuring a distance on his own whiskers, "and he was no taller than your mother, and maybe not as heavy, and yet he could run a race with the Indians as good as a man twice his size. You'd like to know how he did this?"

Even Harriet bobbed her head. Henry sat back in the rocking chair and settled Harriet so that her feet were tucked up in her little blue night wrapper.

"At the contests he'd always beat the Indians shooting at a mark. On trade days he'd swing his gun around and nick off some of the nailheads in the stockade. The Indians wouldn't ever be allowed to carry guns inside there, you

know." Henry managed to get out a chuckle. "The white man had to be boss because he was one amongst dozens and hundreds, and he had to make them think he was the smartest.

"One day an Indian sneaked his gun into the trading post, and when Lessups took out his gun to nick the nails, this Indian fired his gun and aimed above Lessup's head. As quick as that," Henry snapped his fingers, "Less fell to the ground as if he'd been shot. Now if it had been me I'd probably have been too scared to think, but not Less, he fell to the ground and rolled and kicked in proper agony. The other Indians looked awestruck. Before they could collect their wits, Less had kicked the shin of the Indian with the gun—kicked it so hard the fellow had to jump and almost lose his balance. In that minute old Less was off the ground and had the Indian by the wrist in such a way that the poor fellow yelled with pain and dropped the gun. Less bent over and picked it up. He'd got it by a trick."

"And then *he* was a yellow-bellied coward," Steve said wisely from the hearth.

Henry swung around to look at the child.

"Uncle Hez said the bloak that won his first diggin's out at Bitter Root by a trick was a yellow-bellied coward."

Henry looked quickly at Charlotte. All at once her eyes were twinkling. "Quick, boys, off you go to bed!"

She took the sleeping Harriet in her arms and kissed her gently on the neck. "She's getting so big, Henry, I almost can't carry her when she's asleep."

He came and took the child again, carried her to the trundle bed and tucked her in. Charlotte bent to oversee, and as she rose she linked her arm in Henry's.

"So you go to meet trouble yet!" she said, her eyes gay, her smile the kind Henry wanted to kiss; but this time he couldn't for his confusion. He'd made a fool of himself in his suspicions. "But that's you, Henry, and you're the one I want across my table, beside my fire, fetching in my wood and kindling."

He did bend down to kiss her now.

Charlotte was at once sobered. She could hear the little boys arguing in by the fire; they were almost ready to run for their bed. What she had to say was too important to wait: "Don't ever worry again, Henry, I'll make the children understand, and they'll love you more as they grow older because you had the courage to do what you thought best. Can't you see now, Henry, that we're eating our white bread? We can give them the ideas we want, we can keep them close, but someday we'll have to watch them go away from us in their own paths. I'll get the most I can out of these years, and you will, too."

Henry held her close for another moment. She was always right. No man deserved a woman as good as Charlotte and as beautiful. "You're so much to live up to," Henry said, "you and her." He motioned towards the sleeping Harriet, then added as if in afterthought: "And the boys."

Charlotte freed herself from Henry's arms to corral the boys, but Henry stood long by Harriet's bed. He thought he would hate worst for her to ask him where he fought in the war. He couldn't always keep her tender and innocent. Yes, that would be the hardest.

How little Henry had known at that moment what would be hardest! Now, as he looked back on the past days, he

knew that nothing in his life could ever hurt him again. He was beyond pain in the depths of bereavement that we as humans think impossible until we sink therein.

He walked feebly down the front path in the November sunshine towards Vinnie's horses firmly tied at the hitch rack. They were good horses; George always drove good horses. Once Henry had owned a horse named Sorghum, and when Henry had left him with old McQueen he had thought he had reached the depths of bereavement, but he had been young then, only eighteen.

The night when he had stood outside the kitchen and stared at the closed door, when he had heard that his ma was dead, he had thought he had reached the final depths of grief. But Ma was old, she had lived her life; but Harriet and Davy . . .

The funeral had even been a brief, silent one because people were afraid to come. Vida Holtz of all the relatives had been the one who came to help. Vida was not afraid of diphtheria. Henry knew he should have been thankful that Steve was away visiting his grandpa when the sickness struck; yes, he was thankful for that much; but that hadn't helped the other two . . . each of them sick less than three days.

He turned to walk back towards the house. He'd never felt so old and broken; only thirty-six, and yet he felt ninety—just about thirty-three years older than little Harriet had been when she was taken; but it was old for a man.

He hadn't finished getting his corn gathered, but that didn't matter; turn the cattle in, turn the hogs in, let them eat it down. He had enough corn in the crib to feed the horses until next fall. He didn't care if there wasn't a next

year, he was too tired. He bent his steps towards the back door. He needed to rest again. He'd grown tired of listening to Vinnie's chatter. He was glad he was not a woman and had to bear up under the sympathy of talking females. Charlotte didn't seem to mind. This was the third day that she had entertained members of Henry's family, come to make their duty calls of sympathy. Henry was glad his brothers had left him alone except to drop by to ask if they could help out in any way.

Henry walked through the kitchen to the bedroom. The door was open in order to let in some heat from the fireplace. Vida Holtz had helped move the couch from the parlor so that Henry would have a place to lie and rest. It was maybe good that Jim had decided to stay over in the town, where Vida was buying a livery stable. That left Vida free. But Henry felt she'd have come anyway, she loved the children so.

He didn't see how they could have managed without her. She had planned the funerals, and afterward she had come back and stayed a week working to put the house to rights so that Charlotte wouldn't have too much to endure beyond the silence and the feeling that everything was too big and vacant.

The bedroom was far too big. The bed seemed to stand up too high; even with the ruffle down to the floor you could tell that the trundle bed was not pushed beneath. Charlotte had said she couldn't stand the sight of it, or even the thought of accidentally kicking it as she went up to the big bed, so Vida had taken it apart and all alone had carried it away to the loft of the summer kitchen.

Vida hadn't cried all that hard week. She had kept her

face stony calm in a way that hurt Henry more than if she had shed her grief in tears.

Henry lay back on the couch and closed his eyes. He wished he had shut the door that led into the kitchen, for then he might get a little sleep; but that was out of the question now, with Vinnie's voice piping on like a chatterbird in the hedgerow.

He paid no attention until she mentioned the name of Vida Holtz. Henry turned on his back to hear what sharp-tongued Vinnie would have to say about Vida. He did not realize that he was straining every nerve to catch her words.

"I knew when he married Vida Holtz that he was making a mistake," Vinnie said. "She was twenty-seven years old if she was a day when she married Jim, and him only twenty-one. That's too big a difference unless it's the other way round."

Charlotte did not argue. Henry could hear the creak of her rocker. He knew her fine large hands were busy with her knitting. She had offered to make socks for two of Joycie's boys; Joycie had always been a poor hand worker.

"George is only two years older than me, and look how we've got on."

"Yes, you've done mighty well," Charlotte said in her smooth warm voice.

"I'll admit that sometimes I've wished there didn't have to be so many young ones, now that Molly's weaned. I guess I'll be havin' another one before the year is out, but that's better than havin' none like Vida. I tell you she's not a woman through and through."

"She was good to our children—loved them more than my own sisters did," Charlotte defended.

"That might be, but why didn't she have any children of her own? Her ma had plenty of them, though only Vida and that brother of hers lived to get their growth."

Henry thought he'd have to get up and go in to close off Vinnie's talking. The way she turned a word was like a knife gouging out the eyes in a potato.

"My ma said," Vinnie went chirping on, "when Jim married Vida, that he was just like the butterfly that flitted around and around over all the meader flowers and then finally settled in a cow pile."

Henry could almost see Charlotte blush. He wanted to get up and rush in there to ask Vinnie if she ever saw a meadow where the cows had grazed, the lush green spots. The idea tickled him. Yes, sir. Jim had settled in a mighty fertile spot. Maybe Vinnie thought of herself as one of the meadow flowers. George had picked her, and George had kept his back bent ever since with the weight of seed. . . .

"But even that don't justify Jim huntin' other meaders. Not to my mind."

What could she mean by that?

"But you are sure, Vinnie?" Charlotte asked. "Vida never said one word about it those days she was here helping."

"She probably wouldn't. She's mighty shut-mouthed, and the neighbors around there says she's even givin' Jim that livery stable in town, that's why she bought it in the first place."

What could Vinnie mean?

"And that little slut of a Mavis, what a wife she'll make! She's not over seventeen!"

Henry sat up on his couch. These three weeks of sickness and death had shut him off from the gossip of the family. Something was happening that he didn't know about. Mavis, Mavis? Why, that was the name of the little girl Vida Holtz had taken in to help when her folks were burned out last Christmas. Vida had bought good clothes for her and made a pet of her, as she had done with Joycie that year before Pa died. Vinnie was an awful gossip. He didn't believe a word of what she was insinuating.

"Any woman that looks like Vida Holtz ort to know better than to take in a girl as milkweedy as that Mavis, simply drippin' sweetness ever' time she's touched. I know I'd not risk it with George, and George has a family to keep his nose to the grindstone and his eyes on the sickle. For my part I think it's the worst disgrace that has yet come to the Brown family, and there's no denyin' there's been some pretty rank ones."

Henry rose up and started for the door.

"But, Vinnie, are you positive about the divorce?" Charlotte asked.

"Well, I hope so! I guess even I'd sooner he got a divorce than become a bigamist. While I was washin' this mornin' one of the Griffies come by and said he'd heard in town that Mavis and Jim was married last night."

"Married!" Henry towered there in the door; his voice boomed out.

"That's what I said, Hank Brown. Married, and what have you got to say about that? It seems to me it's time you and George done somethin'."

Suddenly Henry had a vision of Vida Holtz working

until she could hardly stand, and she hadn't said a word to Charlotte or him about her own grief. She'd sent Jim off to get his divorce before she ever came over to help Charlotte . . . why, that must have been the reason she sent him to take care of that livery stable. Jim! Why, Vida had loved him as he and Charlotte had loved their children.

All bereavement wasn't caused by death.

"And what ort we to do?"

"Horsewhip him! Tar and feather him! Anything to show the town that you don't abide by such goin's-on."

"Horsewhip him, eh?" Yes, that's what Vinnie might think. His family had once shown their disapproval of him. His pa had shut the door in his face, Relly had treated him like a slave, and Jim or George hadn't lifted a hand to make things different. "You say Vida's givin' Jim the livery stable she bought?"

"Yes, I do. Why couldn't she go and fight for her man like a decent woman instead of makin' it easy for him to commit adult'ry and live in sin?"

"What Vida must have gone through!" There was anguish in Charlotte's voice.

Henry looked quickly from her because she was crying in a way that she had never been able to cry for her own loss. He had a great lump in his own throat. Vida had come here and worked to ease her pain, and he, Henry Brown, had taken to his couch with a believed sickness.

He walked over to Charlotte's chair and put his hand on her shoulder. He felt strong. The two of them were as one in their thinking. Charlotte would never ask him to do something that he himself could not believe. It was the finest thing a man could ask of life.

"Charlotte, do you think maybe you'd feel like gettin' a big Christmas dinner this year? You and me have got to be as good as Vida Holtz. We'll have everybody in the family, and Jim and his new wife."

"Hank Brown, I always knowed you was crazy, but never that crazy! I won't come a step, and neither will George or Joycie or Relly," said Vinnie.

"Oh yes, you will." Suddenly Henry was glad that he had put on paper the money that he had loaned George. "You will or I'll ask compound interest on that team I bought for George the year I came from Canada."

"You couldn't!"

"Ask Lawyer Mills."

Vinnie was red with fury. Her narrow little shoulders were twitching with hate.

"A man's family ort to stand behind him, no matter what he does. I think Vida Holtz felt Mavis could make Jim a good wife. In Bible times a man could take a second wife if his first hadn't give him a child. I ain't no judge, but what Vida Holtz has done is bigger than ary Brown alive, and she'd like most if we was to ease things up for Jim."

After Vinnie had gone, Henry went to the barn and did his own chores. When he came back to the house he saw the table pushed before the fireplace. He and Charlotte hadn't eaten alone in the firelight since the children had started coming.

"Smells good in here, Charlotte," he told her as he took off his wraps. He realized that he was hungry for the first time in days. The house was painfully quiet with no little Harriet grabbing him about the knees for a toss-up or David

shouting "Me next," "Me next." So Henry made talk to break the silence. He told Charlotte about the new calf and the need for new hinges on the toolshed door.

"We'll get them in town tomorrow as we drive out for Steve," he said. "It ort to be safe here by now."

Charlotte came to Henry and put her arms about him. "Don't you think that maybe we should wait till Saturday? It's sixteen miles there and back, you know."

Her concern for him touched him almost too much. He was so ashamed that he had been so thoughtless of her and her longing for Steve that he wanted in some way to make it up to her, but he could only say with forced vigor, "No, tomorrow!"

Henry ate three hot biscuits and three fat sausages and two eggs and drank two cups of coffee.

"I'm so glad Vinnie came, Henry. She gave you an appetite!"

"It wasn't Vinnie that did it, but me doin' the chores and rememberin' Vida Holtz. We'll drive by and see if Vida won't go with us after Stevie, and I'll name it to her that if she wants to go out West to see her brother, I'll look out for her place while she's away. We don't want her to be around at Christmas."

"Henry, I never knew anybody like you. At first I didn't like the idea of that Christmas dinner the least bit, but now I think it is the only thing to do!"

"You don't say!" He came around to her side of the table and tilted her chin so that she had to smile up at him. He couldn't say to her that he hoped she and the Lord would forgive him for lying down so easily.

Joycie came in while Charlotte was clearing the dishes.

"I suppose you've heard," she said as she threw her shawl over the back of a chair and went up to the fire. Her blue eyes were bright with indignation.

"Yes," Charlotte said with sweet calm.

"Well, ain't you goin' to *do* anythin' about it?"

"We had a mind to," said Henry, and he told her about the Christmas dinner.

If Vinnie had been angry, Joycie was furious. It took about thirty minutes of alternate tears and recriminations for Henry to get at the real reason for Joycie's emotion.

"Vida told me if I ever got into any money trouble she'd see what she could do about it." Joycie had her trim little feet propped on the hearthstone, and she studied them as she talked. "I was on my way through town today to visit Vida and heard all this scandal. I couldn't ask Vida to loan me money when my own brother had been such a disgrace, could I?"

So it had begun. Henry had helped Hez out a number of times with a loan here and there, but Joycie had not come before. Henry knew now that she must have gone to Vida.

"And you, Hank,"—Joycie's blue eyes were swimming in tears—"you've always been so hard on Hez, but I don't know who else to go to. You've always had it so easy that you don't know what it is to get into money worries."

Henry wondered how she could be so forgetful.

"You're more like Pa than any of the other boys, except maybe Thomp, and he had to be taken so before his time. Henry, do you ever wonder what Thomp would of done if he'd lived?" She stared off into the upper corner of the room, so that her eyes looked even larger; her mouth took

on a tender line. "Thomp was so damned handsome to have married that milky mouse of a Sara."

Henry wasn't shocked at Joycie's change from almost transformed purity to rowdy fact, because he'd watched her grow up, but Charlotte dropped a stitch in her knitting.

"Yes, Hank, I think as you get old you look more like Pa."

Old! Henry straightened; he was thirty-six!

"You look right now like you'd run through a white thread factory and got some of it strung into your beard. Yes, you do, Hank. There's no use denyin' it, you're gettin' gray. Remember how Pa's beard turned gray till you thought sure the corners of his mouth had dribbled milk? On each side it was, Charlotte, just like this."

Joycie was back to gaiety. Henry had to chuckle with her.

Her next question practically yanked him by the ears: "How much money could you raise in a hurry, Hank?"

"Not very much."

"I thought so, and now I don't know what I'll do!" She started to smooth the hem of her blue wool skirt, turned up in her lap for safety from possible sparks from the fire. "The bank says we'll have to raise the money or——"

She burst out into unrestrained crying.

"Or what?" Henry wanted to go over and take her on his knees as he had done so many times when she was a child. But they were both grown now. She had even called him old. "Or what, Joycie?"

"Oh, Hank, you've got to understand."

She cried as loud as the time Pa had let her think he had swapped her pony.

"It just seems us Browns are cut out for disgrace. I tell you I can't stand it, Hank, to have Delia tilt her head at me when she passes and whisper behind her hand to Sina about Hez."

Henry stood up. "Listen here, Joycie, what is all this stir? You seem to be able to take mighty good care of yourself and Hez—what's happened now?"

Henry was thinking he'd whip someone yet.

"But you can't blame Hez, he didn't know it was against the law. He didn't, honest."

"Hush cryin', Joycie, and tell me."

"He sold them mules he'd mortgaged, and he's spent over half the money."

"Spent it!" Henry shouted.

"But he didn't know it was wrong, and he bought me this blue skirt and clothes all around for the children. You don't forget there's five of them."

Henry thought he'd go crazy if she said or even insinuated what Vinnie had said about children. He wanted to spank Joycie for coming over here to get Charlotte all worked up, Charlotte who couldn't even cry when her children were buried and who now had to listen to this show-off.

"How much?"

Joycie bounced out of her chair and ran to fling her arms around Henry's neck. "Oh, Henry, I knew you'd understand. It's only four hundred dollars. Hez says we should sell the place and get out of here—go West somewheres—but I ain't aimin' to be like Mariar. Oh, Hank, you're the best brother a girl ever had."

"Girl!" Henry thought to himself. "She's thirty years old and the mother of five, and yet she calls herself a girl!"

But he'd get the money for her if he had to mortgage his own mules.

It was strange sometimes how one of the younger boys of a family ended up by taking the lead. Henry always thought it was the fact that he could manage to endorse their notes or lend them some money outright that put him in the front with his family—though he gave most of the credit to Charlotte for abiding with him no matter how tough his loans turned out, and plenty of them had been bad.

He knew this time that he was going to have to talk mighty sharp and look mighty pleasant to convince her that he was doing right.

Hez said again, "Be goldamned, Hank, if you ain't the only one that's able to help out this time. I don't see how you do it—farm and still make such a hell of a lot of money."

Henry hadn't minded so much that first time to help Joycie, for it clinched Joycie's support to that Christmas dinner for Jim and Mavis, but the times had come oftener, and he had at last had to send her to the bank for a mortgage on her place.

"You see, Hank, this is really my chanct to start all over." Hez leaned on the kitchen table and ran his hands through his thick black hair.

The years had been kind to Hez and Joycie. She still had the brightest, biggest blue eyes in the family and could still turn the tears on and off as she chose. Henry suspected she'd never found them persuasive with Hez.

"You owe it to your sister Joycie to help me out."

Henry wondered. He wished Charlotte hadn't gone off

with Steve to visit her sister. He hated making such a decision alone. Just how far was he responsible for Joycie?

"The govermint is openin' up a new tract of land in Oklahoma April 22, and it's all free! All you got to do is run for it and stake off what you want." Hez was dreaming squint-eyed at his pipe smoke. "Seems I ain't ever knowed nothin' but debt since I got into this family."

Henry wanted to remind Hez that Joycie got eighty acres of good black dirt free of debt or back taxes the year she married, and enough money to set up to farming.

"I know what you're thinkin', Hank—that I ain't saved. Well, I'll be damned if I could ever be as tight with my cash as you've been, and remember I've had five mouths to feed—not one."

Henry had grown so he could ignore remarks like that. His boy Steve was sixteen now, and Henry and Charlotte had done everything they could to make up to him for being alone. Once in a while they were afraid they'd been too good to him when he took so much for granted, as he had the time he told them they'd all end up in a pauper's grave if they didn't smarten up on some of their leaching relatives.

"Yes, Hez," Henry said, "you have had responsibilities, but ain't you afraid if you go to Oklahoma to make that run that it'll be the same thing over again? Land free for a few years, and then a first mortgage and a second?"

"No, I ain't, because them kids of mine is gettin' big enough to work. Life ain't allus a-goin' to whip Hez Eagan. Anyhow, that first mortgage on that place wasn't my idea. That was pure and simple Joycie's notion, and if you hadn't managed to get her a loan back in '80 we'd be on easy street

now, but years of interest eats like rats in a corn crib, and I ain't one to deny it. Hell, Hank, if you hadn't got her that first loan she might of sold that place and we'd be in California now eatin' the fat of the land."

"Like Ed's did."

"Now don't get so damned sarcastical, Hank. You know Ed wasn't ever no manager. Why, he practically give you this place when he got the itch to go to Montana."

"I paid him a good price," Henry defended.

"And there was them that thought you niggered him out of that place to get the big house and the railroad right of way."

"Hez Eagan, I've a mind to whip you." Henry pushed back his chair and stood up.

"Jist hold your hosses, Hank." Hez waved his pipe. "I didn't say I was one that thought it."

Henry kicked a log in the fireplace and seemed to get some relief at the sight of the sparks that swirled up the chimney. In all his life he'd never known a more aggravating person. Here sat Hez wanting a gift of five hundred dollars to take his family to Oklahoma to make a run for land, and you'd think now if ever he'd keep a civil tongue in his head, but not Hez Eagan.

"It's a-goin' to be devilish embarrassin' for you to see your own sister's family turned out on the county." Hez blew smoke rings and strung them on his pipestem. "Them folks sure will say you took advantage of Ed and Will when you bought up this property—a hundred an' eighty acres clear after you sold that right of way, and cash in the bank."

"Hez Eagan, if I thought I'd be shet of you and your insinuatins I'd give you five hundred dollars!"

"It's a bargain." Hez picked up his hat. "Want to put it in writin'?" He pulled from his pocket a clean sheet of paper which looked mighty queer to Henry. It looked as if Hez Eagan had come over here knowing that he could just aggravate a man into giving him what he wanted.

Henry sat alone by the fire after Hez went off waving his hat. Hez Eagan! He'd be out of cash in another six months, but he'd be in Oklahoma and he couldn't goad Henry into backing him again for some fool idea.

Hez lacked something in his marrow; he didn't have enough of the toughness of the Browns. Joycie, if she'd been really Hez Eagan's kind, would have been licked by now with such a man, but she'd go off with her chin up and she'd make every woman that saw her jealous because she wasn't getting a chance to go off to settle some strange country.

Henry thought that maybe the reason Jim just had to leave Vida Holtz was that she always made things too easy for him. Jim had his nose to the grindstone now, all right, Mavis never very well and that little girl of theirs white as a lily, but Jim so happy he even kept his hair and mustache dyed. It wasn't in the Brown blood to lean on other people or to whine, though Joycie had been kind of a weight now and again. Take George—he and Vinnie with seven sons and two daughters had a good start towards a good solid fortune. And Relly had kept her head higher the worse off she and Nate got. She even managed someway to make her oldest boy a doctor. And Will out West never came home . . . he must have died out there or he was too proud to come home to admit he was whipped.

Henry wished he knew how to be sure Steve would have guts enough to take what came and not be foolish. He

guessed you just were strong or you weren't according to the blood that filled your veins. You couldn't ever make a child brassy like Hez any more than you could make him want to stay with the land. He had to be that way in the beginning.

Steve thought he wanted to go to college and be a pharmacist, and Charlotte said a father shouldn't make a boy be something he didn't want to be. Henry couldn't understand Steve. You'd think being raised on a farm, with a chance to watch things grow and feel the seasons change, would be all a boy needed to make him want to stay there. Steve was different, and he'd go up in the air when he heard his pap had promised to advance the Eagans money to go to Oklahoma, but sometimes you had to pay high to keep peace in a family.

Yes, sir, that's what he was doing. He was paying to keep from having a continual argument over Joycie and her future. George and Jim would come out and argue, and Relly and Nate would join in, and they'd all say Henry was the logical one to do the helping because he only had one son and after all he had sold that right of way to the railroad and made enough to have his property clear. But if any one of them had chosen to take thirty acres of wood instead of cleared land they might have had the railroad money, for it was ten acres along the woods pasture and the rest off of Will's and Ed's part.

That was the way wars started—one country feeling another had niggered it out of something—when part of it was just chance. He didn't know, when he made his choice, that the railroad would go through there.

Neither did the settlers who came to New York and

Massachusetts know that because they didn't need colored men to work their crops they'd be in the place to tell the South what to do. The North had been lucky because they'd no need for slaves. Just suppose they'd realized that the whole business of slavery was chance, and had tried to settle it all with money, paying for the slaves instead of cannon and guns and wool materials to clothe an army . . . and not thousands of men like Thomp shut off from life in a trench with nineteen others . . . or pensions and hospitals.

He didn't hope to make Steve understand this. Steve would only feel the pinch of having to get along without the new cutter and a trip to St Louis with the cattle.

I X

HENRY'S FIRST GRANDSON was five years old when the Spanish-American War came in 1898, and Henry was so grateful that Steve was married and tied down with responsibilities that he almost felt like making another bargain with the Lord.

"Remember how I had to beg like everything to get you to let him marry when he did?" Charlotte reminded him. She was sitting in front of the beautiful new stove that Henry had bought her to replace the fireplace in the parlor. Charlotte did not smoke, so an open fire was wasted on her. She was young-looking at forty-four in spite of the gray streak that sprang from her left temple and threaded back through her luxurious brown hair.

"I know. You always was longer-headed than you looked to be. To see you a body might think you took all your time to keep your house clean and your hair slicked up. But tell me, have we ever done or said anything that might make Steve understand what it means to kill?"

"But what can a person say or do?" Charlotte looked puzzled.

"There must be somethin'. Supposin' we start havin' them grandsons out oftener?"

"Nothing would please me more, but aren't they young to start preaching to?"

"Maybe they are. But somehow we never have time to teach our own children special things. I had time to play with Hannah and talk to her like Ellery talked to me, but when Steve was growin' up, I guess I was too busy makin' both ends meet. Grandpas and grandmas ort to take time out for their children's children."

The next time he went to town he brought both little boys out for dinner. Charlotte wasn't surprised, because their mother always seemed glad to get them from under foot for a while. Little Hank was such a fearless child he'd just as soon walk straight under a mule's heels as pick up a baby chicken and squeeze it to death with his affection, so he was a responsibility. Ralph was different. He would stand off with his hands in his pockets and ask questions like an old man.

"Grandma," he said quietly, "did you know that Great-aunt Relly's Ellery is going to war?"

Charlotte laughed at the way he rolled all those words off his tongue.

Henry, who had come in to dinner and was washing his face, spluttered into his beard.

"War?" He wanted to know how the child felt.

"Sure, the war with the Spaniards, wicked old men that can't talk English." He frowned solemnly. "Cousin Ellery's

going as a doctor, but he'll give poison to the Spaniards so they'll die and can't kill our soldiers."

Who had been talking before the child? Henry looked at Charlotte.

Little Hank, who had chased the cat under the stove out of reach, came back with a stick of kindling over his shoulder. He was a little over three, and yet here he was marching about the room shouting, "Sojer, sojer!"

It was all right for Ellery to go, he was over forty, and his wife had money of her own and didn't need his pay. Anyhow he would save life . . . not take it. But it was all wrong for these little fellows here to feel that war was fine.

These grandsons of his must learn what it meant to die, and to love to live. The old woods pasture had been cut over for walnut trees to send their father to a school of pharmacy, and eighty acres of the farm had been lopped off to set him up with a drugstore, but there were still plenty of trees and flowers and birds as thick as berries on a bush.

Henry asked Charlotte if she'd get dinner extra for the little boys every Saturday. He'd go get them if he had to hire another hand to do his work. "They got to know something to play besides fightin' and soldiers!"

"That's fine, Henry, but do you think they'll remember anything you tell them?"

"They will if I keep at them long enough and you hold out with the grub."

"As you please, Henry, just so you look after that daring little Hank."

"My, how you've changed! I thought you was the one to amuse children in the woods. You had over a dozen that

day." Henry chuckled into his beard, now almost as gray as Pa's was when Henry went to Canada. "I'll bet you planned to meet me that day."

"Why, Henry Brown!" Charlotte always acted furious when Henry teased her about their first meeting.

He came over and smoothed back her hair. "I allus hoped you kinda did plan that meetin'."

"You fraud, you!" She reached up and took him by the ears and pulled his face down so she could kiss his forehead. "I bet you bribed one of those children to suggest the place!"

This was always a new topic with them even after more than a quarter of a century together. Once in a very great while he would add:

"I'd a-done worse than that to get you to sit by my fire."

But Charlotte, who had heard the story from Hannah, knew that she was fortunate not to have asked Henry Brown to go to war for her.

The Spanish-American War lasted but a short time, and even if Steve had not been married, he might not have gone. But Steve's boys wanted to play sinking the *Maine*, so Grandpa Brown taught them to make willow whistles and how to stay on a running horse without a saddle. Yet in spite of all his efforts (over two years of Saturdays), they wanted to play killings. Henry decided that it was time to tell them about the squirrel rock and the day he had seen a man die.

He tried to make it simple and honest, yet impressive enough to leave a mark on their minds. Little Hank paid excellent attention, even to falling down twice as if he had

been shot in a duel. Henry wondered if he had been a little early in telling it, though at five or seven years a child should begin to know certain things.

That day at dinner he was convinced he'd been a fool.

It was in the fall, right after the fresh molasses was made from Henry's own cane. Charlotte had made light rolls, and the boys were filling up. Little Hank was pouring molasses into his plate with admirable concentration; it was all he could do to manage the big pitcher.

"Hey, young 'un, ain't your eyes bigger'n your stomach?" Henry asked.

Little Hank slowly took his knife and scraped off the lip of the molasses pitcher before he spoke. "Say, Gramp, did that man's eyes turn up like a chicken's when you wring its neck?"

Charlotte looked at Henry, and Henry looked at both boys. "What do you mean, Hank?"

"You know, the man that got himself shot down by your big tree in the woods."

Henry turned red and choked on a piece of bread. Charlotte went to the pantry for more butter.

Yes, Henry felt mighty foolish. . . . You had to be careful what you told to young 'uns—maybe you shouldn't ever tell them anythin' with a moral. Let them get their morals somewhere else, not from a grandpa. You couldn't tell people how they ought to feel about things, anyhow; you just had to let them live and watch and maybe learn somethin', and after this he'd know better than to expect little savages to understand the fine points, and now he'd have to tell a hundred stories about Canada and the Indians to cover up that impression of dead men's eyes little Hank

had got! Eyes! He hadn't even mentioned Ellery's eyes. He'd leave the preachin' to the preacher after this.

Certainly no man was more worshiped on Sundays than Grandpa Brown. He was a deacon in the church now and could take up the collection and pass communion. The boys sat with their mother in the same place every Sunday and waited for Grandpa to take their money in the little red velvet bag on the hoop at the end of a long black pole. Sometimes little Hank would have to keep him waiting while he took his money out of his boot top or from the pocketbook with the three compartments that clicked together at the top. On the Sundays that they forgot their money, Henry would pause just a moment before them as if waiting for their collection. This would cause Little Hank to turn red from suppressed giggles.

Grandpa's beard made him look older than he actually was, but almost nobody ever suggested that he cut it off. If there had been little granddaughters, Henry might have had to submit to being braided and beribboned, but his grandsons only chose his beard as the best place to hide the thimble.

Steve would call the boys down for being so rowdy with their grandparents, but he admitted it was mighty nice to feel that the boys were safe when he and his wife went away to Kansas City for a week end. Steve worked hard in his drugstore and was making a good living for his smart little black-haired wife and family. His aunt Vinnie always said he had the real "git up an' git" of the Browns, but Henry felt it was his wife's ambition for money and position that made Steve such a pusher.

When Steve's wife died in 1905 after a three-days' ear-ache, Henry was sorry he hadn't been more sympathetic to his daughter-in-law. She had been fond of her boys, though she'd rather sew herself a fancy dress than play with them.

At first it had seemed wise for Steve to break up house-keeping and move to the hotel; to let Hank go live with Henry and Charlotte and to send Ralph to his other grandmother. But Henry had better ideas.

"Now, Steve, these boys need a real home, and there ain't sense in your separatin' them. I know a woman about my age who'd be just fine with them boys, and nothin' would please her more than to spoil 'em and feed 'em and cuff 'em around when they need it."

Steve was so grief-stricken that he didn't argue. "I guess their mother would sooner have them together, and they might even be a lot of help to me in the drugstore."

"This woman I got in mind smokes a pipe," Henry said. Steve hadn't grown up around women who smoked, so Henry wasn't just sure how he'd take to that.

"Well, I smoke, too. Can't make the house smell much worse. Nothing more depressing than going into a house where the smell of smoke is dead. Bring on your woman."

So Henry drove fifteen miles to fetch Mag Epper to keep house for his boy, Steve. She had changed less than Charlotte during the years between. Her plainness had not increased, and her hair was hardly more faded, but her tongue had sharpened along with her sense of humor. She became "Cousin" Mag to her distant cousins and took command.

Henry felt that at last he had paid his debt to Mag. Anyone permitted to be around Hank and Ralph was mighty blessed, but most of all Steve had been saved from breaking

up his home to become a hotel owl or a boardinghouse shadow.

Charlotte grew fond of Mag, and on Sundays Mag always came with Steve and the boys for dinner, and before long it was settled that she should fix one big dish as her contribution to the food. Henry ate again old-fashioned meat pie, tomato dumplings, fried apple, dried-apple pies, molasses cake with soft icing, or transparent pies so rich you had to drink two extra cups of coffee to get them down.

These were proud years for Henry. From his hundred acres he was making a better living than from the one hundred and eighty, and Steve's drugstore was more than paying its way. Ralph seemed to take to store business, but Hank hung around his grandfather's farm every chance he got, and like a yearling calf you could see him grow. In another year he would be too big to ride on the corn planter to help check the corn. Henry was making the most of this year.

At the end of each four rows they would get off to rest their horses. Henry tried to talk to Hank as he would have talked to a man, Hank in blue overalls and a new straw hat, his eyes as blue as Ma's ever were, and his hair as black as nigger Tapp.

Around ten in the morning Henry always took time off to smoke. He would lean against a fence post and light his pipe slowly, savoring every pull. Hank would sit beside him and talk. Today, as Henry lighted his pipe, Hank moved to another fence post.

"I don't smoke," said Hank, taking off his hat to beat at the grass beside him.

"Oh, don't you?"

"No, I guess I'll wait till I'm older. Twelve is kind of young to smoke, don't you think?"

"Umhum."

"How old was you when you started smokin'?"

"'Bout eighteen."

"On your road to Canada?"

"Umhum. Might be a good idee for you to wait till you're that old if you could."

"Oh, I can. It ain't no fun."

"Tried it?"

"Umhum."

"Behind the barn?" Gramp kept his eyes on the bay mares hitched to the planter.

"Yes, but more than that. I smoked a real pipe."

"Well, I'll say!" Henry's voice showed proper respect.

"Sure!"

"One of your dad's?"

"No. Cousin Mag's."

Henry was hoping his pipestem would hold out as he clamped his teeth. Mag's pipe was stronger than lye; with all his years of smoking he wouldn't want to have to try one of her pipes. He took a deep breath.

"Swipe it?"

"No! She gave it to me. She's swell. One day some of us boys had been trying to smoke cubebs behind the barn, and, do you know, that very afternoon when I went home Cousin Mag offered me a smoke. We sat right there in the kitchen and smoked together."

Oh, Henry wished he could have seen this! He could hear

Mag talking as she smoked—she'd be blowing rings about Hank's head while that poor little boy tried to get away with her strongest pipe.

"Smoke a whole pipeful?"

"Well, just about, but Cousin Mag said lots of folks never smoked a pipe clear down to the bottom, and anyway I don't see how she can stand to smoke in that hot kitchen—she keeps a fire roaring in the stove fit to burn down the house."

"Women are that way about a cookin' fire. I recollect my ma always wanted the fireplace bright when she set down to smoke."

Henry had to cut his rest period short so that he wouldn't have to face Hank.

In April 1917 "Little Hank" was twenty-two and as tall as Grandpa. His older brother was twenty-four, engaged to be married and in Kansas City working in a pharmacy.

"All the boys at the university are enlisting," Hank told Henry. "I can't see how I can face them if I don't."

"How can you face yourself if you do?"

"Don't preach, Gramp. You never did before."

Gramp had taken to chewing tobacco. He held his snow-white beard and spat into the ashpan. "These doctors say smokin' will kill me. I guess I'll have to get used to spittin' over this beard. I've had it since I went to Canada in '62."

"You're making fun of me, old man. Anyway, Canada is not neutral territory now."

"The fightin' is on foreign soil." Gramp's hands were clutching the arms of his chair. "Face it."

"Even the professors at the university are signing up. They painted one prof's house yellow. I couldn't stand that, Gramp, I'm darned if I could."

"Easier to slash out the guts of a German, I guess—a German that you ain't got a thing against. In ten years from now they'll know this is just another war that they didn't have to fight. They'll find that there are them that's makin' profit out of war, but then it'll be too late, a million boys like you will be in trenches like your great-uncle Thomp—buried in a grave with nineteen others like him. What for? Because there wasn't anybody with guts enough to stir up the country to refuse to fight, guts enough to make them arbitrate across a table. That's what they have to do in the end—better do it first than last."

"But I might not even have to go over." Hank's voice rose high with agitation.

"Then you're a worse coward than I thought you was." Old Henry spat again. His hands were still freckled, and the hair along his wrists was still reddish gold. It seemed to bristle as he gripped the arms of his chair.

"I can't stomach these conscientious objectors."

"Don't have to. Do somethin' else. But if you and others like you don't do somethin', there'll be wars till kingdom come."

Gramp got up and stalked around the room. He was still straight when he was mad. He towered there above the youth; his white beard and hair in the dusk seemed to float.

Hank suddenly thought that his grandfather was cracked on the subject of killing—"just like old John Brown on the subject of slavery." Somewhere Hank had heard that old John was supposed to be a distant cousin. Like old John,

Gramp would ride his idea to failure. After all he was an old man, almost seventy-three. He was simply childish. What did it matter, one more or less in the army? One man more or less. It would be a damned sight easier to face a zero hour once . . . that might be enough . . . than to face the sneers of co-eds. Gramp hadn't loved a woman.

"Delia wouldn't marry me." Gramp was simply stripping his soul. "Even when she came back a widow, she shut the door in my face after she had ripped my pride to pieces. The ugliest girl in town even cut me like I'd been a thief or murderer. The good people of the church wouldn't even sit beside me, or even have their horses tied beside mine! . . . Don't tell me anythin'. But I married your grandma, and she thought I was right . . . maybe."

Hank let his head bend forward on his hands; he couldn't bear to see Gramp expose his feelings. "Clare's dad is in charge of military training at the university. You might talk marrying to Ralph—his girl would sooner marry him than see Ralph a hero any day. She's like Grandma."

Hank dragged himself out of the chair wearily. "I'm sorry, old man. I hate to do this to you, but what else is there? Maybe I can get killed first."

Gramp groaned. "I reckon I know how Pa felt. He thought he was right. . . . I know I am! But I guess you can't ever teach anythin' like war to people . . . or not goin' to war . . . Charlotte once said . . ."

Pa's illness was the only thing that had brought Henry back to the big house. Gramp caught at his left side. If Hank could be kept home till after school was out and all the shouting had died down! This wasn't a holy war. If Hank only had a responsibility! The old ones had to make excuse!

Hank received the telegram, signed "Grandma Brown," as he entered the frat house:

"YOUR GRAMP VERY ILL COME HOME AT ONCE."

Gramp lay very ill for fourteen days. Even the doctor couldn't be sure what was the matter with him.

"But I got to git out of here and plant that south forty," he would moan in young Hank's hearing.

"Now, Mr Brown, you'll probably be right here in this bed for another week. Can't you hire a hand?" the doctor wanted to know. When a man seventy-three was down with such a pain in his side you could about count on its being the end.

Henry ate no food for seven days; he simply had to make that much concession to his illness. He asked Hank to go to town and hire a hand to run the farm.

"But there's nobody right now wanting a job." Hank twirled his hat in his hands. "If I stay here three more days, I might as well give up this semester's work at the university anyhow."

Henry closed his eyes and looked very ill. Charlotte had pulled the shades, as Mag had done when Pa lay dying.

"You're as good a hand as I'd want. The government is goin' to need a lot of grub to feed that army," said Henry to Hank.

Hank did not look up from his hat twirling. "Do you have a plan of what you want put into the fields?"

"Not on paper, but allus in my head."

"Well, you'd better pearten up, old boy, or I'm liable to plant just what I damn please and turn your place into an experiment station."

Henry knew Hank was grinning.

"Probably learn more than if I finished out the term."

It was all Henry could do to keep from jumping out of bed and clapping young Hank on the back. In the days that followed, Henry learned more of restraint than through all his other years. He must lie calm, he must walk feebly from bed to chair, he must eat delicately, as if the sight of good food sickened him, and above all he must have no tobacco.

"Don't be too concerned about me, Charlotte. You know when I once start gettin' peartened up, the house can't hold me."

"I know, Henry, but it is a shame you can't see how fine Hank's taking hold of things on the farm. Why, he's doing two men's work."

"Is that so?"

By June Henry was able to walk out to the lane to see the wheat field, young Hank on one side and Charlotte on the other. He did look frail—"so bleached out you wouldn't recognize him if you met him in a fog," Mag had said. But to Henry this walk on the good earth was beyond expression. Never before in his life had he been shut in for a whole spring. The day he had taken sick he had walked from the woods pasture to the house; willows were the only trees in leaf, the oaks were at the tender pink stage, and only the winter wheat fields were green, and as for birds, they were still looking for a place to nest.

Today he was in a new world. Green leaves were thick to hide nests and builders, the cornfields at a distance looked like Ma's old flock-dotted petticoat. The hedgerows were

ready to trim, the cherries were ripe, wild gooseberries in the woods pasture were about gone, but blackberries were beginning to darken. The ground was mellow to the plow; a growing wind rippled the wheat.

The next day he asked Charlotte for a pail. He would go down the hollow to see what he could fetch for the table.

"But, Henry, are you able?"

"Be good for me. Need fresh air and sun on my head."

So he went off. He was glad to be alone. "A body never knows what bein' cooped up is till he's shut away for a while." The earth was springy beneath his feet as he crossed the lane to go down into the woods pasture. There had been plenty of rain, and grass and weeds were luxuriant. The trumpet vine on the fence post was almost too rank this year; he'd have to tell Hank to keep down the suckers.

Henry bent to pull a young cocklebur plant from the driveway. If you waited till a wet time came, those weeds were ahead of you; you had to watch every day as you walked to the fields or came back to the house. The woods pasture had plenty of grass this year. Henry was glad he'd always kept a piece of that original timber. He must tell Hank about that water gap, those willows he'd put there needed a little help; Mabrie's hogs had come through and rooted up the grass in spots—mushrooms probably.

He followed the path through to the spring where grape and blackberry vines grew wild over the bank. He had to sit down to rest awhile before he gathered enough berries for Charlotte to bake a pie. The shade was thick here under the oak trees. "And a man has all these for this life. What more could he aim to git in heaven?" He took off his hat and dried the sweatband on his sleeve. If his life depended

upon telling any soul what this moment held of perfection, he should have had to die. The chatter of squirrels in the distance, the scolding of jays in the oak, the love warble of songbirds in the hazel brush were one with the shades of green from palest willow to darkest elm, the trunks of the trees rising above him to the blue of sky glimpsed through peepholes in the foliage . . . these treasures were not itemized and catalogued, they were still so abidingly new to him that it was as if he experienced them now for the first time. He could smell the blackberries above the scent of earth in June. How could a man with the chance to farm choose anything different! His pa had bought this land from the government for \$1.65 an acre, and he'd cleared most of it with the help of his sons, and it was still raising as good corn and wheat as any farm in the community. Spring could never come without his wanting to plant and sow, and summer without hay and small grain would be like a fall without corn on the stalks and bedding down the cattle or driving in the sheep. This had been good land, a good climate. Never a year when everything failed; this was good country.

He got up from the stump where he had been sitting and went to the bushes to gather enough berries for a pie. Tomorrow he would go to the cornfield and know if Hank had kept the earth mellow, and the next day he would walk through the wheat field. Come a good spell of weather and no hail or beating rain, Hank would have a good crop.

There were plenty of people who would have criticized Hank if it hadn't been for his grandfather's illness, but the boy was too busy to go about much anyway. Henry felt

sorry after the second month, when Hank's letters stopped coming from the girl at the university, but not sorry enough to wish that his grandson were in her father's regiment.

The girls around town were setting their caps for Hank, but he gave them almost no time. This did not worry Gramp at all, because he had found Charlotte when he was twenty-eight.

Gramp was proud of Hank's farming and the way he took up old ideas and made them better. "You're goin' to make a real farmer, Hank."

"Oh, I don't know. I kind of thought that when this war is over and you're back on your feet again I might go to the university and study farming, with hopes of teaching it."

"Why not take over this place here?"

"Oh, lots of reasons, but most because I want to teach other farmers what you've taught me. Maybe it's the old missionary urge."

"Or the hopes you'll run across that Clare girl again?"

"Maybe."

"I guess then I'd better sell off all but this twenty where the house and barn and woods pasture is." Henry sounded depressed. "I'm gettin' mighty old, boy."

"Yes, you are, the way you tried to run the socks off of me trimming that hedge!"

Gramp thought he'd better be more careful. He did wish this war would end itself. Such a waste of money and men kept him stirred up till he was really sick, but even he had the good sense not to voice his opinions in public. He didn't care about himself, but he'd certainly hate for any patriotic bunch of bond buyers to come out and paint his gate yellow

just to humiliate Hank. Each night, after he knew Hank was asleep in his upstairs bedroom, Henry would take Charlotte's flashlight and look at all the gates and barn doors to see that they weren't painted yellow. He knew exactly what he'd do if they were, but fortunately there was no need for him to call Charlotte to help him carry a gate or a door out behind the barn to burn it. Maybe humans were getting better and had some respect for different opinions. That was surely the way things should be in a world as big and rich as this.

X

IN JULY 1922 Henry would have his seventy-eighth birthday. The rest brought on by his two years of illness back in 1917 and '18 must have done something for his heart, for he was able to do more work than the average man of sixty. He ran half of his land, was an elder in the church, and several times served as arbitrary agent for groups of men in land complaints. Old Henry took a sly pleasure in this because he knew he was knocking Delia's eldest son, John Mills, out of a fat fee. John didn't need it anyway; he was making money hand over fist.

Delia was getting queer in the head, but all her children kept her so surrounded that few people knew about it. Delia's husband, Vernon Mills, had been dead now for ten years. Delia's daughter, Marcia, the youngest child, had always been rather plain, and because she was so much younger than the rest, was expected to take care of her mother. "Poor Miss Marcia!" someone was always saying

when her mother went into one of her tantrums and scared them all half to death for fear she'd kill herself.

Henry wanted to tell them that if they'd just make life exciting for Delia she'd quit her spells. He knew she was just sick and tired of being tame, she was bored with Miss Marcia and being called Grandma. Henry chuckled to himself every time he heard something of it in town. Why wouldn't children let their folks do as they pleased? Yes, sir, he and Charlotte were about as satisfied as two cats in a barn full of mice. Henry even forgot his birthday until the mail carrier left a stack of letters bigger than he had ever received at Christmas.

"Well, I'll say, Charlotte, if this ain't somethin', to get old enough and tamed down so that most of your relatives will send you a postcard on your birthday!"

There were simple cards, fancy birthday cards, expensive greetings and one letter. Hannah, who was now living with her daughter in Kansas, had sent around word for the card shower, and it was one of Hannah's granddaughters who wrote the letter.

Henry and Charlotte saved it till last. "You read it out loud, Charlotte, I'm not much at readin' this fancy writin'."

So Charlotte pulled her rocker closer to the window and started reading:

"Dear Great-uncle Henry:

"I told Grannie it would sound too silly for me to be writing to you, but honestly I'm so excited today I could do anything, and I've heard so much about you from your 'devoted niece Hannah' that I honestly feel I know you.

"Yes, 'Hannar' is all right and, as you might guess,

spry as a cricket, and if you'll believe me you can still tell that her hair was brownish red—you know she was sixty-seven this summer.' ”

(Charlotte and Henry paused to laugh.)

“ ‘But me! I simply have to tell you my good fortune. I've actually got a school to teach next year, and in town, too. I went to the teachers' college at Emporia a couple of summers. You'll die when you hear what I have to do, though, to get the job. Hold everything so you won't fall down and crack a rib laughing—I have to join that positively ghostly body of the K.K.K.

“ ‘Don't tell anyone that I'm laughing about it, because they take themselves so seriously—you should just see them march in their hoods and sheets—in fact I know I'd not get the job if they thought for a moment I wasn't impressed.

“ ‘Well, happy birthday, dear Great-uncle. Grannie said you always planned to get out here to see us sometime but that you'd always held yourself in readiness to doctor or bury some of the relatives and just couldn't be spared.

“ ‘Love,

“ ‘Young Hannah.' ”

“Charlotte, you've got to write to her to tell her she can't join that Klan.” Henry thumped his chair arm.

Charlotte laughed just a little. “Now, Henry, don't get yourself all stirred up about that. It's her business.”

“Maybe so, but it ain't my place to let her get herself into

some bunch she ain't even holdin' respect for." His neat white beard shook with his agitation.

"Oh, she's probably exaggerating."

"Exaggeratin' nothin'! I didn't tell you, but last week in town Dan Hubbard, Sister Relly's own son, asked me if I wouldn't be interested in joinin' that Klan. I tell you, Charlotte, there's an organization right here in our own community. And the next day a deacon in the church named the same subject to me."

"Well, maybe there's need for it that we old people don't know about."

"Charlotte Brown, as long as I've lived with you I ain't never had a mind to criticize your ideas. When the Klan was organized back in '65 and '66 it might have had a place because there wasn't order, but there's no excuse now."

"Of course I read in the paper every now and then some of the doings of the Klan, but I think maybe I've always thought of it just as another lodge."

"But lodges don't go around scarin' folks or makin' teachers join up before they git a job."

"Well, for my part I just can't think it's very serious. Anyhow, that's one of the consolations of getting old." Charlotte folded her glasses and laid them on the table before she got up to start dinner. "You don't have to be mixed up in things like this."

Henry snorted.

It was less than a week later that their little religious paper carried an article about the Klan. Charlotte read it aloud to Henry.

"You must have been right, Henry, for here it says that

the Klan's prime purpose is to persecute Jews, Catholics and Negroes, and that no true Christian would tolerate its growth. I thought we were all getting along so well together."

"So did I."

"Remember Alex Abramson, Henry?" Charlotte sat thoughtfully quiet for a moment. "He'd always save his finest piece of wool for Baby Harriet. Her little peach dress she was buried in was made from a piece of wool Alex had laid back on a shelf for me until I came to town. He brought out a waxed wreath to put on her grave that first spring."

"We don't know many Jews. There's got to be plenty of ornery ones because all of us humans has our evil-headedness, but they sure don't have a monopoly on it. Here in town you couldn't ask for a more orderly bunch than them niggers across the holler. Relly's nigger stayed with her even after the emancipation. I'd like to see some white folks that beholden."

"And Catholics, what have they done?"

"This seems to me like some kind of a graft, else why would decent people join up with it? And Hannar's granddaughter! I tell you there must be somethin' to this we don't understand."

"I wish Hank would come by this summer and we would talk this all over with him. Steve's always so busy." She didn't say why Steve was so busy, but Steve was being rushed by the younger set in town.

But Hank had gone on a geological survey from the university where he was a teacher, so Charlotte and Henry had to continue getting their news from the papers. The Kansas

City paper seemed in favor of the Klan, or at least they didn't print a lot against them; the little church paper sent out a slip saying their publication had been suspended for the time being; and the home-town weekly stayed completely off the subject.

Once Henry and Charlotte walked out through their lane to the top of the rise to see if they could tell whose straw stack was burning, and found a fire in the shape of a cross.

"So long as they go on paradin' around in nightshirts and masks and don't do nothin' else, I guess we shouldn't worry. In a town the size of this there ain't much to git vigilant about, I reckon."

And then, one night in November, Henry was awakened from a deep sleep.

"Charlotte, do you hear somethin' out towards the west?"

She raised her head from the pillow. "Sounds like somebody after the chickens. You know there's been a lot of chicken thieving around here."

Henry got up and pulled on his trousers and snapped up the suspenders.

"You'd better take the gun, Henry, it might be a weasel."

It certainly sounded like a flapping of wings.

Henry grabbed his coat and the gun and started off. Charlotte shivered at the window. There seemed to be some kind of strange light down in the woods. She ran and got her slippers and her winter coat and started off after Henry with a flashlight in her hand.

Barely out the back door, Henry knew that the light wasn't in his barn or henhouse; it was farther away and he had to get there fast. He was glad for the open path from his door to the woods pasture, as he went plunging

through the darkness towards a sort of smudgy light among the trees. Somebody might have started a fire there by accident and be having trouble to put it out. He could still hear the flapping sound that had made him think of chickens' wings.

But old Henry was not prepared for what he saw. There was a torch of soaked rags casting shadows on a circle of white-clad figures that flailed at something with laths.

"Hey, what's the trouble?" old Henry yelled.

The flailing stopped, and a voice that sounded familiar to him gasped, "Jumpin' Jehoshaphat!" One of the masked figures leaped for the speaker as if to choke off his wind. Henry could see a huddled figure on the ground.

Henry still carried his gun. He never did know what made him put it to his shoulder. "Who you got there?"

Nobody answered.

Henry backed them off at the point of his gun away from the figure on the ground. He wouldn't dare stoop to unbind the fellow.

"Don't be scared, this old coot won't shoot, he don't believe in killin'," somebody yelled.

"Maybe not," Henry shouted, "but I could nick a few of you so I'd recollect you next time I see you. If this man's dead on my place, somebody will pay for this. Get over there, you with the short sheet and gum rubbers, and untie this fellow." Henry motioned with his shotgun. Nobody but Lafe Griffie ever wore gummed rubbers like that.

The man had started to obey when Henry heard a gasp behind him and turned to see Charlotte come into the circle of light. In that unguarded instant someone leaped for the gun and knocked it from Henry's shoulder.

"To the cars!" somebody yelled, and like a streak of white geese rising from a pond they disappeared in the direction of the road.

Charlotte was bending over the figure on the ground. His hands were tied in front of him, his mouth filled with rags.

"I hope you have your knife in your pocket, Henry."

There was Charlotte as calm as if this were an ordinary thing. She'd been just that way when the children were dying with diphtheria. . . . He could see her face, so drawn and white that he would hardly recognize it, and Baby Harriet past all human help.

He put his hand before his face to brush the scene away.

"Henry, do you have your knife?"

Henry felt in his pocket and handed her the knife. The bone handle was worn smooth.

The fellow was not dead. Between them they got him to the house and onto a couch. The exhaustion that dragged at their arms and legs let them know that they were growing old. Yet Charlotte did not stop until she had washed the welts and found one of Henry's clean nightshirts for Henry to put upon the fellow.

By then he was beginning to swear. Henry was relieved; he'd thought for a while that he might have to fetch a coroner.

"Damn their hides, I'll make them pay for this. Get me John Mills on the phone before their tracks are cold."

"But it's past midnight," Henry said. "Lay back there and git yourself some rest."

"Rest! Hell, this ain't no time to rest. Them bastards thought they'd found some of Dan Hubbard's hogs on my

place. I can prove they're my hogs. They've been trying to get something on me ever since I moved here. I'm the wrong race, but I'll make them pay a thousand dollars for every damned welt on my hide."

Dan Hubbard! Relly's Dan! What kind of a mess had he got himself into? This man on the bed might be a regular varmint, but if he, Henry Brown, didn't do what he could to expose the men who had beaten him, he'd be just as low-down. Now Henry remembered that it was Dan's voice he had almost recognized. "Jumpin' Jehoshaphat!" Relly's youngest boy. This might turn out to be a family affair before it was over.

Henry left the man and went in to Charlotte, who was trying to kindle a fire in the kitchen range.

"Felt so cold, I thought I'd better heat some water."

She was shaking with a chill. He couldn't ask her advice when she was in such a state.

"You go to bed, I'll bring some hot tea and a water bottle. There ain't a bit of spirits in the house. That's my only objection to this prohibition business—affects the innocent, 'cause them that want to drink has bootleggers!"

"Now, Henry!" Charlotte's teeth were chattering, but she tried to smile. They had never kept spirits in the house—after all, she was a preacher's daughter. It was one of their little jokes.

Before he'd got the water hot the man was calling from the other room: "Have you got John Mills yet? He'll damn near break ever' last one of them Ku Klux Klanners in their damned windin' sheets."

Henry didn't want to help the fellow. He wished he had the nerve to tell him to get out of the house and to his home

as best he could. He was too old a man to be mixed up in a mess like this. But he took the hot water to Charlotte and came back to call John Mills.

John Mills at fifty-two was certainly the image of his pa. If he'd had a black mustache, Henry might have thought he was dreaming and that it was Vernon Mills coming into the kitchen again; the only difference was that all the first people had died off or grown too old to matter, but Vernon Mills was like a hardy plant that bloomed again.

Henry had to jog his thinking to remember that this man was Delia's boy and had a right to look like Vernon Mills, his father.

"What is the trouble, Mr Brown?" His voice was as smooth as cream.

"It ain't for myself I called you. There's a man in here."

When John Mills came back to the kitchen he thrust out his hand to Henry Brown.

"I'd like to shake the hand of a man I've been taught to think was a snake in the grass and a coward. Since talking to Jake in there, I have decided you've got more nerve than any ordinary soldier! Your wife, too, for that matter."

Henry felt his eyes moisten. "No, it ain't that, it's just that I had a gun in my hands. . . . I guess I'd of used it, too . . . that's the trouble of havin' guns."

"The good Samaritan really didn't have to take the fellow to the inn, either—but he did, and that's how the Lord happened to have the story!"

It was late praise to come from Delia's side of the house, but it took some of the sting away even though he knew John was exaggerating.

"I realize that Dan Hubbard is your nephew, and what

this may mean to you in causing a family row. You could have left Jake there to get home as best he could—you could even have turned him out of your house tonight. Now that things have gone this far . . . I realize I will have to do my duty as I see it.”

John Mills brought suit against twelve men for twelve thousand dollars in behalf of his client, Jacob Loeb. The charge was kidnaping and beating with intent to do bodily harm. John had planned to make the amount fifty thousand, but Henry had refused to be a part to that.

Henry Brown and his wife Charlotte were chief witnesses.

“Why in the name of all that’s holy couldn’t you two old people have slept through that night?” Steve begged when he heard of the trouble. (Steve finally had given up the house and now ate all his meals at the hotel.) “People won’t even eat next to me at the table, I’m a pariah! And John Mills will try to ruin every one of those men, or he’ll drag the case along until there’s not a family left in Clayburgh township that hasn’t felt the effects.”

“I know, and I think probably this Jacob is a skunk,” Henry said stubbornly. “But what could I do?”

“Oh, it’s too late to *do* anything now—you should have thought of that before! But that has always been your way! You act, then think afterwards! This is ruining my drug business—and what about Aunt Relly’s Dan? Thank God she didn’t live to see this day!” Steve turned red in the face and looked out the window. “You could, of course, let yourself be declared mentally incompetent, or I’d even pay your way to go visit Aunt Joycie in Oklahoma and you

could take to your bed down there just as you did here in '17."

Old Henry rose and swayed by his chair. "If you wasn't flesh of my wife Charlotte, I'd send you out of this house and hope never to see you again. That I could live to see the day when my own son would say such a thing!"

"But Pa—"

"Git out before I say things that no father would ever want remembered by his son, and go back to that bunch of Ku Klux Klan and tell them they stink like cholera hogs about to die." He looked every day of eighty, and when his big hands waved in gestures they seemed to swing from puny wrists.

Before the trial came up in the January term of court, Henry was asked to resign as elder because five of the men sued were deacons in the church. At first Henry refused, but when he was finally visited by the pastor, who said they might as well stop having services if these five men and all their relatives and friends left the congregation, he gave in. The preacher was young, and you could tell he felt mighty bad about the whole thing. He even said he saw Henry's point and admired him in his soul, but his reputation as a preacher was at stake—to have a church die under his ministry would be ruin. After all, if only Henry came to church the whole object of religion would be lost, for Henry didn't really need a preacher.

No, Henry guessed he didn't need a preacher as long as he had Charlotte. He hated all of this worst on her account. She liked her friends, and church services and ladies' aid and quilting groups, yet she couldn't even walk down Main Street and hope to have three people speak to her.

She looked bad too, had ever since the night the thing had happened, but she tried to keep cheerful around the house and cook good meals, though she didn't eat enough to keep a quail alive.

Once, while they were at dinner, John Mills came out to talk to them. "You must eat more than that, Mrs Brown, if you hope to have the strength to testify for right and justice."

Henry wished he hadn't put it in such resounding words. It scared a body to think he was so mighty important.

At last the day of the trial came and he and Charlotte went to the county seat. Mills got them a room at the hotel and promised every comfort. He advised Charlotte to get as much rest as she could this first day while the jury was being chosen. After all, she must be at her best for tomorrow, or the next day or the next; she was to be his prize witness. Henry could come first, and then he could hear the rest of the trial; he could be in the room when Charlotte took the stand.

There were six days of trial before they even got to Henry. Each day he and Charlotte went over to the witness room and waited. They had no desire to walk up and down the halls as the other witnesses did; they sat huddled in their chairs, saying little, expecting nothing from anyone except John Mills. Age seemed to force months upon them as the hours passed. Henry's fury towards his own relatives who scorned him so for his necessity upheld his will, but Charlotte had nothing but her single desire to support Henry in his need.

When he was at last called, he patted her hand and told

her he'd hurry back. As he came into the courtroom there were "Oh's" and "Ah's" like rice at a wedding; he could almost feel them bounce off, they seemed so harmless. As he took the oath he realized that this was the first time he had ever had to testify in a trial. Over soon, over soon, he kept telling himself and took a firm hold on the arms of the chair.

John Mills came in with such confidence and pride that Henry felt ashamed for him. There were Relly's boy and George's oldest, Joel, and the five deacons in the church. He didn't want this little Jew to beat them, no, he didn't . . . he wanted all of them to walk out of here to their homes free men, and yet what he would say might make them have to pay more than they could afford. Why had he felt compelled to testify? He knew. Next time they might kill a Jew or a Catholic or a Negro. That little Jew there had his pride the same as those men, and his rights.

Henry cleared his throat and tried to answer the questions as they were put so that none had to be repeated. His face was flushed above his white beard, his eyes shone sharply blue.

"Your witness," Mills said after a short fifteen minutes of questioning.

The lawyer for the defense had been imported from St Joseph and was making too much effort to act like a native of the county.

"So you are Mr Brown?"

"Yes."

"Henry Brown, age seventy-eight?"

"Yes."

"Was the gun you drew on a group of unidentified men one that you had used in the war between the states?"

"No."

"You *were* in that war?"

"No."

"I object! The material is irrelevant," John Mills called.

"Objection sustained."

"Well then, Mr Henry Brown, is it true that your father claimed to be a cousin of old John Brown?"

"Yes, he claimed it."

"And yet you, a cousin, did not fight in the war that old John was supposed to have started?"

"No."

"I have been told you do not believe in killing. Is that true, Mr Henry Brown?"

"Yes." Henry wanted to rise up and tell this insolent young puppy that he should use respect for those he questioned. If he would only wear his sarcasm out on him and have a little kindness for Charlotte!

"Your gun was loaded, of course?"

"Yes, I keep it for hawks and crows."

"And yet you have admitted that you said, 'Maybe not, but I could nick a few so I'd recollect you the next time I see you?'"

"Yes."

"You had a shotgun in your hands, not a rifle, remember."

"Yes."

"You have had experience with shotguns, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"You are aware that the shot spreads, often bringing down seven quails at a time?"

"Yes."

"And yet you, a man whose entire life has been spent as an object lesson against killing, drew a bead on twelve men with a shotgun."

Henry did not answer.

"You could easily have wounded twelve men—seriously blinded them, killed them from infections, disfigured them for life."

"I wasn't thinkin' of that at the time."

"What were you thinking of, Mr Henry Brown?"

"The man on the ground."

"During the Civil War you were not moved to kill for the cause of the downtrodden black man. In fact I'm told you were able to turn your back completely upon their suffering because you, Henry Brown, did not believe in killing. An entire race degraded, downtrodden, enslaved."

Henry looked about the courtroom. There were Joel, George's boy, and Dan, Relly's boy, sitting together; their fathers had fought on different sides. The nephews were watching the jury to keep their eyes from their uncle. As Henry looked at them, he realized they hadn't wanted to hurt Jacob Loeb any more than he wanted to testify at this trial. He meant always to do what he felt compelled to do.

Henry remembered Danny when he wore the suit with the brass buttons. Henry had ridden sixteen miles altogether to get those buttons because they would look so fine on Danny's suit that his mother had made out of some of her old riding habit.

"I ask the jury, does all of this make sense? A man with the physical timidity that this Henry Brown has always exhibited, to suddenly have an about-face of character? In

1917 he kept his grandson from enlisting by letting him farm his acres! We know, then, that as late as 1918 he did not believe in killing, and yet here he comes bolting down into a woods in the dead of night and says he saw twelve white-clad figures—twelve, my honorable judge and jury—and admits that he pointed a shotgun at their heads, a loaded shotgun. It is too fantastic, your honor, too fantastic to even require expert medical men to examine this witness for mental competence.”

There was no question to answer, Henry tried to rise to his feet to defend himself. . . . Fantastic! Fantastic!

“Your honor!” Henry tried to get the floor.

“Your honor,” the city lawyer intoned with tender dramatic voice, “the defense would like a recess.”

What kind of business was this? A snicker went through the room after a tense silence.

“Go back to the witness room, Mr Brown, I may need you again. And you won’t have to listen to your wife’s testimony. . . . I’ll tie that man in so many knots he’ll wish he’d never brought up the subject!” John Mills had two lines of fury between his eyes.

Henry was so tired he could scarcely leave the stand. His feet felt heavy and his mind a blank, but when he caught the eye of Charlotte as she came in he prayed the Lord to keep her safe.

. . . Incompetent! That was what Steve had begged! Suppose after all this the lawyer could somehow have the case thrown out because of his own incompetence? Why, he farmed his land! He wasn’t even absent-minded like Jim got before the end. But *was* he, and nobody had noticed it?

If he just hadn’t got Charlotte into this! John Brown’s

cousin! Suppose old John at the trial wished he hadn't murdered the men at Pottawatomie, but felt somehow that he had been compelled to do it!

Why hadn't Charlotte slept through that sound of beating wings? Why?

And then he straightened. "Lord, don't let me back down now, and help John Mills to talk fast and say the right words for Charlotte's sake and for the sake of all the little men that might git beat up some other time if this ain't stopped." He walked with a firm step to his chair beside the window.

The judge had a reputation for quick trials. This one had dragged on too long, so that when John Mills asked for a recess it was not granted. Some said that was what had caused the trouble, but the doctor said it would not have made a difference, it was the final excitement of being questioned by the defense attorney.

Henry was startled by someone calling to him: "Your wife has fainted."

"Fainted!" His white hair stood awry, he stumbled forward. She'd never fainted in her life before.

"She'd finished her testimony, it's all down in the reporter's book," John Mills said. "She'll be all right. Everybody give her room and go on home. We're resting our case."

They were carrying Charlotte in. Her arms dangled like a rag doll's, and Henry hurried to take her hand.

"Oh, Henry, I'm so sorry to make myself conspicuous," she said later as she lay in the hotel room and gasped for

breath. "But John Mills was so kind to me—if I'd been his own mother he couldn't have been more considerate."

There were those who suggested that Charlotte's illness had been feigned to help John Mills's case. Nobody had ever heard him make such a passionate plea to a jury. "If we don't win this case here today we will carry it to the highest courts of the land."

At this point the flashlight bulbs of the photographers from the city presses popped. There was only one hitch in the whole matter: the alibis of the men were almost perfect. Too perfect, the judge said, and on this the jury hung. There wasn't even a question of having Henry examined by an alienist because, with Charlotte's testimony, his could have been stricken from the books and still have left a perfect case against the twelve.

After twenty-seven hours the jury came out with no decision—there would have to be another trial.

Charlotte simply broke down and cried. She couldn't stand to go through it all again, she was sick, she needed a good doctor. John Mills ordered an ambulance from St Joseph and sent her to a hospital. Henry rode beside her and kept assuring her everything would be all right. He felt dizzy from the smell of the purple orchid John Mills had pinned on Charlotte's coat before they left. "You won't have to go through another trial, Mrs Brown, be assured of that."

He didn't tell her that he would hold the threat of another suit over the twelve men for what they had done to Mrs Brown's health—it was an open-and-shut case. On his first visit to Charlotte in the hospital he told her that the whole thing was being settled out of court. It would cost

every man around eight hundred dollars, but after all that was getting off cheap for what they had done.

But Charlotte was beyond caring much either way. Her days and nights had settled into a round of suffering that left nothing of herself to be concerned about trials or little men.

The doctors finally told Henry there was no hope.

Until then Henry had been able to endure these endless days because he felt that she was getting well, but when he realized that this was the end he grew bitter. If she had been a cow or a horse, somebody would have put her out of her misery, but being a human in a hospital there were people always around to prolong her life. They'd taken some kind of a vow that forbade them to just let a person die and get peace. And Charlotte, who had never hurt a creature in her whole good life, had to suffer. Twice Henry begged the doctors to stop giving her dope so she'd go out in one of the spells, but they looked at him queerly and had him watched every minute he was with Charlotte.

He and his wife, who had been together over fifty years, had to talk before strangers. Neither of them said much. He just sat beside her bed and held her fragile hand. Now and then he'd try to make her laugh by talking about the day they had first met in the woods pasture. But laughter had gone out for both of them.

Henry had to borrow money from Steve's new wife, Loretta, to bury Charlotte. It seemed too bad to Henry, for Charlotte hadn't especially liked Steve's second wife. . . . She was fifteen years younger than Steve and, come to think of it, she'd run after him, calling him up at the drug-

store and hotel whenever she wanted him to take her to a party even before she was promised to him. Steve at fifty was learning society. Loretta belonged to a lot of initial organizations and a couple of bridge clubs. She planned to build a new house just off the highway on one of her farms, and Steve, in order to run his drugstore, would drive back and forth in a sports roadster, exposed to the weather.

For the funeral John Mills sent a blanket of lilies of the valley and sweetheart roses that covered Charlotte's coffin and sort of made up for the lack of other bouquets. Young Hank couldn't get away from his university, but he did send a sheaf of Easter lilies and a card that Henry could not bear to read. Steve sent white carnations tied with a lavender bow.

Everyone who thought of the matter at all thought that old Henry would follow Charlotte to the grave in a short while. What had he to live for, anyway, scarcely on speaking terms with any of his relatives? The wives of the men who had been sued finally started inviting John Mills's wife and daughter to parties again. The whole town got back into the swing of the fabulous '20's, but nobody seemed to remember old Henry Brown out there alone in his ancient house.

Christmas 1923 came on a Tuesday, and old Henry had made himself lie in bed until six o'clock, though it certainly was no pleasure to lie there remembering past Christmases. He lay in the bedroom off the kitchen that Pa had always liked because he could see the light from the fireplace. Pa had been raised by the light of a fire; he just hadn't been able to get used to doing without it.

Maybe Pa was lucky to die when he was still young, only a little over sixty, and here he, Henry, was almost twenty years older. Ma had always seemed old to Henry, and yet Ma had been about Steve's present age when the war broke out.

Steve and Loretta had gone into Chicago for the holidays. What would there be in this old vacant house to make them glad, anyhow? If Hank hadn't married a girl from Jefferson City he might be coming to surprise his old Gramp. He should have married a home-town girl. He might have if his old Gramp hadn't made him go off to the university after the war.

A man really ought to have some of his relatives around him at Christmas.

Henry had told the woman down the road who did his dishes up every morning that she needn't come on Christmas Day. There wasn't a cow to milk if he did get up. He'd let the woman down the road take the cow for her own use as pay for doing his daily chores. What use had he of a cow, anyhow? Charlotte was the one who had used cream in her coffee.

When he started thinking of Charlotte he had to get out of bed and go to the kitchen to stir up the fire. He could see his breath, but the weather wasn't cold for Christmas, and there was no snow for the children. Hank made a sled for himself once like the ones the Indians used in Canada.

This was going to be a Christmas as lonesome as the worst one up there. Lessups—good old Lessups!—and he had sent Joycie a fur neckpiece, and little Hannah had been jealous. It was funny Ed had let Hannah keep the one her uncle Henry had bought for her.

He'd always been in hot water with his relatives, but this business of the trial had been worst. Yet to whom could he go to ask forgiveness? George's wife was really the only one of his family still alive, and he hadn't seen her since before he had to resign as elder of the church. He knew he would have to do the same if he had it to do over again.

He dressed himself and fixed breakfast.

He washed his own dishes.

He even made up the bed and swept the floor.

He took out yesterday's paper and started to read it all over again: President Coolidge had sent a message by radio to the MacMillan expedition at the North Pole, Henry Ford was not going to run for President, he was backing Coolidge for the nomination, Secretary Mellon explained why he wasn't for the soldiers' bonus. Then Henry looked at the advertisements—Victrolas and pianos and new furniture—and even these newfangled machines that got music out of the air—radios. And then Henry heard the clock strike seven.

He got up from his chair and went in to get his watch off the bureau. That clock was crazy again. It should be striking eight, he was sure. But his big gold closed-face watch showed the time as seven. Henry held it to his ear.

"I must be the crazy one," he said out loud in the cold bedroom, his breath making mist that hung before him in the dead air.

The very sound of his voice startled him. "It ain't right old people should be alone at Christmas." He went over to the big walnut wardrobe that he and Charlotte had bought the first year they were married. "It's about time somebody makes the first move."

The smell that came out to him when he opened the wardrobe door reminded him so much of Charlotte that it almost undid his resolution. He closed his eyes so as not to see the shriveled clove apples dangling from the rod.

He would go to see Vinnie, George's widow, and tell her he was sorry that he had been forced to testify against her oldest boy, Joel. Vinnie ought to understand. She was old enough.

Henry remembered that a long time ago, when Steve was just a child and there had been a family gathering for something or other, Vinnie had said something about too many children. He had felt sorry for her, and here she had outlived George and two of her sons, and her tongue was probably as sharp as ever. He'd take her sharp tongue, along with her warm house and a feeling of Christmas, in preference to this cold empty one so full of memories that it was like a cellar in the dark where you have to feel your way about to keep from barking your shins or cracking your crazy bones.

He heated water and washed his beard. There might be children at Vinnie's who would think he was Santa Claus. He couldn't have Santa's beard disappointing. He concentrated on getting himself dressed up. He could harness his horse without getting dirty, though Charlotte had always carried a whisk broom when she came out to get into the buggy for church.

It was almost ten o'clock when he drove up to Vinnie's. There weren't any cars out in front, so he supposed maybe he was just in time to wish Vinnie a Merry Christmas before she went away to have dinner with some of her children. He knew he was going to be disappointed.

Vinnie's house was nice and big on a neat street, and it had the freshest coat of paint. Henry remembered the years George and Vinnie lived in a weather-boarded cabin that had never seen a brush, and here she was living in a house without even a hitch rack in front.

Henry always carried a weight at the end of a long strap to fasten his horse in this town of automobiles. He caught himself taking extra time. It wasn't especially cold, but he adjusted the blanket over Kip's round back with immense care. Suppose Vinnie should close the door in his face? He was getting pretty old for anything like that. He squared his shoulders and went ahead.

Vinnie herself came to the door.

"Christmas gift, Vinnie." Henry felt as tottery as Vinnie looked there on her rheumatic feet. She was weazened and old, with fine silvery hair combed smooth from a part in the middle.

"Christmas gift, Henry." Vinnie held out her gnarled little hand. "Nice weather we're havin' for Christmas. Won't you come in and set a spell?"

She went back to her narrow cane rocker beside the base-burner and took out her pipe. She knocked it against the brown spittoon that she pulled from under the stove.

"Might's well take off your coat. You come for dinner, didn't you?" Her sharp voice cracked; the sound was almost like the sound of the pipe bowl cracking on the spittoon.

"Not unless I'm wanted." Henry felt his back up. He could go out home and fry himself some ham and eggs and make a pot of coffee as good as any woman except Charlotte.

"Take off your coat." She spoke to him as if he were a boy.

He obeyed.

"Want to smoke?"

"No pipe."

"Chew?" She had lighted her pipe with three furious draws.

Henry remembered his beard. "Guess not right now."

He could hear talking and activity in the kitchen.

"Havin' company?"

Vinnie took her pipe from her puckered blue lips. "Just all my children and in-laws and grandchildren and great-grandchildren."

Henry felt lost. The red glow of the base-burner had looked so comforting. He would have to go home and get his own dinner. "Well, I'll be gettin' on, then."

"No need. Me and you are the last of the old generation. I figure it might be well if we set down at the head and foot of that table, come noon."

No matter if Vinnie's oldest boy Joel didn't speak to his uncle Henry when he came in with his family; it wouldn't matter now. Vinnie was the one from his own generation. She was the only one who mattered.

"See that Christmas cactus?" Vinnie changed the subject. "I'm aimin' to give ever' one of my boys one of the blooms to wear on his coat today—there's twenty-one blossoms."

She got up.

Henry always marveled at the way she still moved so fast. She was over beside the great Christmas cactus. Her head barely came to the top of the plant as it stood there on

a pedestal, bowing with its burden of red "shooting star" blooms.

"I guess I'll give you the first one, Henry Brown. Just wait till I fetch a pin."

Four of Vinnie's sons and their wives, Abbie the only daughter, the new preacher, and Henry and Vinnie sat down at the first table. Abbie's husband had left her for another woman. Henry thought that if Abbie'd had the spunk of her aunt Joycie she'd never have let Red Lewis get tangled up with another woman, but Abbie was enough like Relly to be her daughter instead of Vinnie's, and he could never imagine Relly taking out with a gun in her hand after any woman alive.

The granddaughters carried in the food. Henry kept taking a little of everything that was passed to him until there was no more room on his plate. There was fried chicken, roast turkey, baked ham; mashed potatoes, creamed potatoes, baked squash; sage dressing, oyster dressing, escalloped corn; green beans, lima beans, baked beans; creamed peas, buttered beets, buttered carrots; peach pickles, dill pickles, sweet pickles; pineapple salad, coleslaw, baked cinnamon apples; cranberry sauce, cranberry jelly and six kinds of jam. For dessert there was mince or pumpkin pie with cheese or whipped cream, with strong hot coffee that hadn't been boiled, and never was your coffee cup empty.

With all that food and the confusion of getting it passed around and finding out who cooked what, there was chatter enough, with no embarrassing general conversation until Vinnie cut into an instant of quiet:

"I suppose all of you seen that picture of the big Klan funeral last Sunday."

If she had thrown a live kitten onto this loaded table she couldn't have achieved more active results. Joel's wife tried to change the subject by reminding her mother-in-law that old man Mabrie was to be buried tomorrow.

"Hank, we cain't be sure that we won't be the next ones," Vinnie chuckled, "so eat till you're full. Joel furnished the ham this year—he did have that much money left! Right good and fittin' that he pay for a non-Jewish meat, I think."

Henry had to laugh out loud with Vinnie, and everyone else was forced to join in.

The new preacher realized that he was here as a peace agent, so swung the talk quickly to the bonus.

"Mr Mellon says 91 per cent of the soldiers will take their bonus at once. There ought to be good price for your stock if that's passed."

"It won't be passed. Not with President Coolidge so opposed."

"That iceberg! All he can do is veto it, but Congress will pass it over him."

The discussion got pretty hot. Joel's oldest had fought in France, he needed his pension; Abbie didn't think it was needed now, with taxes already so high she could hardly pay them; the preacher's wife was a Democrat and Joel's wife a Republican, while Vinnie's youngest son was simply rabid on the subject of the American Legion's being able to swing such power. He was going to choke on those velvet-smooth potatoes if the subject wasn't changed, Henry could see that. "Just wait till you have to pay all of

them pensions," Henry said. "You'll probably live that long."

The preacher tried to arbitrate and made matters worse. "Now you, Mr Brown, how do you feel about pensions? You probably fought in the Civil War and know from experience."

It was again shrewd little old Vinnie munching her food like a cow chewing her cud who saved the situation. "See, Henry, I told you that beard always made you look older than you'd any right to look. It was my husband that went to the Civil War. Left me home with two little 'uns. Jesse, him that's dead, and Joel here was babies. I could spank your britches then when you needed it, Joie."

"That's right, Mother Brown," Joel's wife said, with the condescension that only in-laws can feel towards the old. She patted Joel's hand as if to restrain him from talking out of turn. Joel coughed into his graying mustache. He was sixty-three, and his oldest grandchild was ready to graduate from high school. It rather tickled him to have Ma remind him that he had been little once . . . so that that young granddaughter standing by the door heard it. She was making signs to him to hurry up; there would be three more tables after the old folks got through.

As Henry drove home he thought the place wouldn't look so bad now that he'd spent so much time at Vinnie's. You'd have to admit, even a stranger would have to admit, that there were some mighty good cooks in the family; he'd put them up against the world's best. Maybe Joel would have enjoyed his home better if his uncle hadn't been there, but Henry couldn't help laughing at the thought of little old

sharp-tongued Vinnie. She always had rubbed salt into people's blisters.

There was a car parked in front of Henry's house. He whipped Kip to a faster walk. The license plate wasn't a Missouri one, either. As Henry drove into the lane, the back door of the house burst open.

"Be darned if I didn't think I was going to have to send a search out for you."

Henry could scarcely believe his eyes and ears, for there was Hank striding out across the yard.

The old man could scarcely keep the tears from showing in his voice. "Bless my soul, but how'd you git here?"

"In the flivver, and I'm going to stay all night."

Hank still grasped his grandfather's hand.

"You look well enough, Gramp, but I don't know but that you're not getting enough to eat."

"Aw, now Hank!" There was pride in his voice. "I just come from Vinnie's and one of the finest Christmas dinners I ever eat."

"Once in how long?" Hank was unhitching Kip with such speed that Henry finally backed off and made no offer to help. Hank's hands like his body were long and lean with the Brown size, but his hair was not like that of any of the Browns, it was as black and shiny as hot tar.

"Shall I turn Kip out into the lot?"

"Might's well. Let him get a good roll before I put him in to feed."

The two went up to the house together, and Henry suddenly realized that Hank was the taller.

"Got a surprise for you, Gramp."

"Not a grandbaby?"

"Say, give us time for that, old man!" Hank's white teeth looked so young and strong.

"Bring your wife?"

"No, she stayed with her grandmother in Kansas City and let me come on up here to see you. We had Christmas Eve and dinner there."

"You don't say—and you was that close!"

As they neared the house Henry thought he heard singing; he put one hand up to his ear. Maybe he was getting absent-minded, "incompetent," hearing noises—roarings in his head. But when Hank stepped ahead to fling open the door Henry realized he had heard right.

"Music?"

"A radio! Come on in!"

"Hank, boy, you can't afford that!"

"I made it myself—bought the parts over a period of two or three months."

"But I ain't ever heard one except with little receivers you fit over your ears!"

"No, this is new."

"Hank, you shouldn't of spent so much!"

"Now what do you know about my finances? . . . That's what you said when you sent me to the university the last time."

Henry smelled smoke. In fact, now that he was paying attention, the room was blue with it.

"Hank, you've taken to smokin' a mighty strong brand of tobacco."

"No, not me."

Henry heard a chuckle from behind him. "Mag Epper,

I might a-knowed there wasn't anybody else in the world that smoked a pipe so tarnal strong."

Mag came out and took a chair beside the cookstove. "One of Hank's tricks."

"Well, Cousin Abbie wrote to me and said you looked thin, Gramp. Less than three posts later I heard Cousin Mag here was looking for a place to stay, so I just drove up and got her and moved her in to keep house for you."

"That ain't quite true, Henry. They was aimin' I should go to the poor house, and Hank here moved me in on you."

Suddenly Henry remembered the little girl with the burned hand, pitiful, scrawny, shy.

"He ain't even consulted your new daughter-in-law, either." Mag lifted the stove lid, thrust in a twist of paper and brought it out to light her pipe; there were vigorous pulls and violent puffs that turned the air blue.

"Think you can stand her?" Hank asked.

"Best in the world if she can cook like she used to," Henry bragged.

"Remember when you turned her loose on me when I was about ten years old? Pipe and all."

Henry burst out laughing. "I never did get to laugh my fill over that. It busts out ever' now and then when I think of it."

"Go on now, Hank,"—Mag curved her crooked hand about her pipe bowl—"at least I don't have to cure Henry of smokin' out behind the barn."

Hank and Henry both laughed.

"I can see him yet, so sick I thought he was goin' to faint, but he had the guts to hold hisself straight and smoke her down to the last. I got to thinkin' I'd made a mistake

until he started weavin' towards the kitchen door, askin' me didn't I want a little fresh air."

Christmas carols filled the room, and the three stopped talking to listen. Henry completely forgot that only this morning he had thought his pa lucky for going young.

This wasn't like the big dinner at Vinnie's, something you'd know at best would be over in an hour or two. This was more like a young 'un at Christmas counting off the days till the next one. He'd heard there was even a farm program on that radio sometimes, and just today somebody had said that the President had sent greetings to a man at the North Pole. There just wasn't any limit to what might happen.

Charlotte had liked Mag. There'd be a different smell about the house now, but Charlotte would be glad to know that Mag was here and that Hank had thought it all up for his old gramp. Yes, sir, Charlotte would be mighty content if she could know.

And more content than ever if she could just have heard what Hank told his grandfather after Mag had taken her traps up to the bedroom over the kitchen.

"Gramp, you're going to be a great-grandfather this spring."

"You don't say!"

"Yes, sir. Sometime around the last of March. That's why I didn't bring Sylvia with me from Kansas City. The trip from out West was more than she should have taken, but you know her pluck." Young Hank talked on to let his grandfather recover from the sudden glad emotion brought on by the announcement. "That's why I was so knocked out of talk when you asked me if the surprise was a grand-baby. I was afraid somebody here had already told you, and

I wanted to be the first. Funny how the thought of the coming of this baby has changed my whole outlook on life."

"If your grandma could just have lived to hear this, Hank!" Henry blew his nose.

"We thought we'd name the baby Mary Charlotte if it's a girl. If it's a boy, well,"—Hank paused, almost abashed—"I guess he'll have to be the third Henry Brown."

"Well, I'll say!" And then old Henry had a quick twinge of conscience. "How about your pa?"

"I was his second son."

Gramp laughed so that his beard fluttered. "You sound mighty confident there'll be a second son, to be a Steve."

But young Hank was serious. "Sylvia thinks it's wrong to bring up one child alone."

So had Charlotte . . .

"If I can keep my job with the university, I guess you can count on two or three more great-grandchildren."

"Keep your job! Is that hard?"

"Oh, not too hard—plenty of compromises one time or another, but so far the ax hasn't been heaved my way."

"What would you do if it fell to you?" Henry remembered the time he thought he was going to have to go back to Canada because maybe Pap had cut him out of the will.

"I'd probably come back here and rent a farm. I could do it, you know."

"Course you could."

The next day, after Hank had gone, old Henry hitched up Kip and drove into town to get his will out of his box at the bank. "No need leavin' things like wills to chance when a body is as old as me." Steve's wife liked antiques; he'd let her and Steve have first pick of all the furniture. Ralph

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was making more money than all the rest of the family put together, so he didn't need anything—he'd just give him the old clock, the rifle that had gone to Canada, and the family Bible; but to Hank he'd leave the home place. No need for a Brown, especially Hank Brown, to have to toady to anybody. He'd just depend on Hank to see that Mag got a fair deal.

Yes, old Henry was mighty content.

Now the days did not drag. He watched his radio announcements in the paper, anticipated each new meal that Mag cooked, and counted off the days on the calendar like a schoolboy hoping to hasten vacation.

If Mag had been like other women she might have put in her spare time knitting sàcques and shawls or crocheting booties, but instead she smoked and dreamed and promised Henry that this child would be a boy, for always in her dreams there was daylight—the sun was masculine; if the dreams should be of night or moonlight, the child would be a girl.

They laughed of old times or argued politics or listened in silence to the radio. To Henry it all seemed temporary, so much so that he kept up his company manners to the extent of letting Mag have her choice of radio programs. When he asked her to sew on a button for him, it was as if she were his guest obliging him deeply by conferring such a favor.

To Mag this was nearer perfection than any existence she had ever known; she had complete charge of the house and chicken yard. The first broody hen she found she set on a clutch of chosen eggs. "We'll have fried chicken here by May if that hen don't leave her nest," she said, never

thinking of the months between with hazards of cold and varmints.

And so the days of biting cold gave over to March thaws and a change of color in the hedges.

"Should that baby be a boy, I aim to cut enough fence posts from my hedgerow to buy him a pony," said Henry.

Mag tittered, "There you go! Why, he couldn't use a pony for three or four years—even if he is a boy. You'd better aim to buy yourself a railroad ticket out there to see him and his ma."

"I reckon I Hank could save the money. I aim to trim out some posts from that hedgerow, anyhow."

"Trimmin' posts is young man's work," Mag said as she swept around the stove with a turkey wing. "You'd better be your age, Great-grandpa."

"There ain't actual call for me to be so proud at bein' a great-grandpa. It's just because——"

"You don't need to go on—I know there's them that has great-grandchildren before they's seventy—it's because this young 'un is Hank's. I guess we don't have to explain that to each other."

Even Steve was excited over the coming of this child. His young wife actually went so far as to help him choose a special kind of baby bed in Kansas City. It was all packed and ready to send the minute the word came.

Steve didn't telephone his father, but drove out to deliver the telegram. Mag and Henry were eating breakfast, the house fragrant of fried ham and biscuits.

"You've got a new namesake," Steve called as he came in the door, "a seven-pound boy and doing fine."

Henry was glad for the cloudy day, the gloomy kitchen

and for the fact that Mag openly wept for the joy that was in her.

"And if he's half the man of the two he's named fer he'll be a pride to you, Steve," Mag said.

"He surely will." Steve acted as if he wanted to say more—as if this birth might take away the barrier between the child's grandfather and great-grandfather.

Henry wished he could tell Steve that he was sorry he had caused his own son so much embarrassment, but he felt that in this moment Steve understood what was in his heart.

All that day Henry received callers with congratulations. It was mighty fine to have a great-grandson to carry on the name. He sat beside the fire and chafed at the harness of custom which forced him to receive callers when he wanted most to be out cutting those fence posts.

He left word with Mag that he wanted an early breakfast so that he could get in a good day's work. It had been several years since he'd cut fence posts. That hedgerow must have a hundred fit to use. He remembered when he had helped Pap trim that row back in '60. It was about then that Pap decided they'd let this row grow to its full height to keep the land from washing north into the creek. Later it made a good windbreak when he wanted to pasture cattle or hogs on the corn. For the last forty years that row had supplied posts for the entire fencing of the farm. As the hedges were pulled out for one reason or another, Henry had put in wire fences on the stout hedge posts. It was lucky that ditch had run along beside the hedgerow, or people with cars would have demanded its extinction because of

the thorns, but the highway had been protected by the ditch that flowed into the same creek as the branch from Henry's woods pasture.

Henry found his tools grow heavy over his shoulder as he went to his work. He'd take it easy today and tomorrow, and by then he'd be in shape to do a real job of it. There was still snow in the shadiest spots, though the frost was coming out of the ground, and his overshoes picked up pads of mud and made his feet feel weighted. He should have hitched up Kip to bring out the tools, but that was more bother than it was worth. It was really no distance at all to the hedgerow. Off to the right was the woods pasture, bare now except for the leathery brown leaves on the black-oak trees; in another month those leaves would be pushed off to make room for the new tender pink ones that looked like baby's velvet, or maybe they were the color of babies' tongues.

He chuckled to himself. He couldn't seem to keep his mind off babies today. A pony for a great-grandboy! Wouldn't Charlotte be proud? One spring she'd carried Steve out here to this hedgerow to watch the cutting. Steve in dresses had cried for the cutting saw as it shone in the sun, and now that same cutting saw or maybe another was going to trim out posts to buy Steve's grandson a pony.

The sun was partly veiled by clouds, but now and then there would be a bar of light to glint upon the frost and set fresh beams glancing from the ax-blade.

There had been one brief time in his life that he had considered taking out this row of hedge—he'd read that hedges sapped the strength from the land for many feet—but Char-

lotte had begged him to leave it. That was the way with Charlotte; she had always taken what she had on hand and made it satisfactory . . . as, for example, the way she had kept Ma's old furniture polished and upholstered until now it was of value, so Steve's wife said. Many women coming into the old-fashioned house would have thrown out all the old things and demanded new, but that wasn't Charlotte. She hadn't even tried to make her husband over—just polished him up a bit with flattery and heart-sounding praise.

Henry chuckled again as he laid down the saw and started working with his ax. This hedge was mighty thick; it was a good thing he wasn't afraid of a few scratches. And to think that all of this grew from little seeds in a hedge apple that Ma and Pa had soaked in a tub before they planted them in rows to edge their fields almost a hundred years ago. Tough now, mighty tough and unbendable, but sturdy posts that would bring a good price and stand the weather.

Mag at the house was taking off a setting hen. She was almost as proud of those ten chicks as Hank's wife was of her new son. This was the first year she had raised chickens since she had been a child at the Mabries'. She lifted the downy creatures in her gnarled hands. "Chickens in the pan by June sure, if not by May, but you, my pretties, catin' and scratchin' and chasin' grasshoppers, will be happy growin' big."

She fixed a box in the summer kitchen for the old hen and her brood; it was still too cold to put that poor biddy and her balls of fluff in the open. They'd die with cold in

two days; even quails knew enough not to hatch off their young until the earth was warm.

Mag had been so busy with her chickens that she forgot the time. When she went in to get dinner she realized that it was already past eleven-thirty. She hurried with the corn bread and cut the potatoes into small pieces to boil quickly. But she must have done everything faster than she had thought, because here was dinner on the table and Henry not back to eat.

She waited until twelve-thirty before she called Steve. "Your pa, Steve—did he walk on into town?" Her voice sounded worried. "He went to work at the hedgerow—that's such a short piece from town I thought—"

"No, he's not here. I'll be right out. You stay there and keep our dinner hot. I'll bring him in the car."

Mag knew that Steve's voice was strained, too.

Steve came along the north field, got out of his car and climbed the fence. He could see the brash rawness of new cut posts, the shine of tools. Maybe his father had gone on home in the meantime, but now that he was over the fence he might as well be sure.

"Pa, oh, Pa!"

But there was no answer. He couldn't have had time to get clear to the house. Steve started running across the stubbled furrows, his trim polished shoes gathering pads of mud that dotted his sharp-pressed trousers.

Steve wouldn't let himself believe it . . . he called once again, for there sat his father as if at rest, his head in his brown cloth cap bowed over brown posts that he had cut.

"Pa, Pa."

But Henry could not answer.

Steve was alone and did not have to hide his grief. Suddenly he knew that he was sad, not because his father had gone, but because he, Steve, had never been able to tell him even once that he understood. Yes; that was the way with sons. What was the barrier that grew up between fathers and sons? . . . Or maybe other sons didn't feel it, though he knew as a father what it meant between himself and Ralph and Hank . . . some kind of restraint that women didn't have to feel towards their mothers. There'd be another little Hank . . . if he'd only have another chance.

He felt a strange kind of pride in his father, such a pride as young Hank had felt in the old man. All his life he had made his own father feel that those very characteristics for which he had really admired him most were wrong.

"God, why can't we speak!"

And the lawyers had brought out in the trial that Henry was John Brown's cousin. Oh, what an awful heel the son had been about that trial! When his father needed him most he was selfish and offended. Old John Brown himself might have taken pride in Henry, and yet his own son had given no praise, not even affection.

Steve took off his beautiful new overcoat and laid it on the ground before he gently eased his father's body from the position of prayer.

Steve and old Mag walked through the woods pasture. It had been his idea to take her along. It was one of those first fine April days, and the air was gentle. Mag walked proudly beside him, and as they went through the gate she hesitated as if to let him pass first.

"When Mother was buried," Steve said softly as he stepped back to let her walk ahead, "I didn't notice how shameful it was to have her in the new graveyard without a tree to shade her stone."

"For your pa any place without trees would be inhumanly lonesome, Steve, though I hadn't thought it out till you named it to me, but that's as it should be—you're his only livin' son."

Steve led the way down towards the squirrel rock and the clearing under the great oaks. "There must be a shapely elm down here that could endure transplanting. I've already bought the extra lot beside Pa's grave just to the south to put it in."

"I guess I ain't ever seen a better turnout for a funeral, and such a world of flowers. So different from your ma's buryin'."

"Yes . . ." Steve's voice caught.

"Now there's an elm."

They stood on all sides to view it for form, then tapped and patted it for sturdiness, but in the end decided that it had been too sheltered to endure the open winds of the graveyard.

"Your pa would a-knowed by sight which tree to take." Mag screwed up her face to the sun. "I've a mind he'd take that littler one there on the knob alone. It's wind-tested and maybe got enough spunk to hold its own even out from under its family's shadder."

Steve stooped and tied the scarf about its trunk so that the men might know which tree to transplant . . . with "spunk enough to hold its own"—yes, that was it.

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